

The Ascendancy of the Sorbonne: The Relations between Centre and Periphery in the Academic Order of the Third French Republic

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THE position of the Sorbonne at the peak of the hierarchy of French universities over much of the past century and a half rests in part on the dominance of Paris, already under way in the *ancien régime* and accentuated by the Revolution and Napoleon; it is also a consequence of the location of many other important intellectual institutions and of a very animated literary and artistic life in Paris. No other country in the West in this period shows such a dominion of one university over all the other universities of that country. In all Western societies, certain universities have greater prestige and attractive power among teachers and students than other universities. But France stands out from all others in this regard.

Not even Oxford and Cambridge, in Great Britain, gained the dominance which the Sorbonne had in France. Efforts were made to force the Scottish universities into their pattern, but these were never wholly successful. The University of London—especially University College—never yielded to the model constituted by Oxford and Cambridge. The great provincial universities were also able to maintain their intellectual self-respect in the face of the ancient universities. They became creative centres of science and scholarship and succeeded in holding the affection of many of their teachers.

In Germany after 1870, the range of dispersion in status between the most and the least distinguished universities was narrow. The universities were not financially dependent on the central government; competition between states for the eminence of their universities intensified competition among universities. For most of the nineteenth century there was no central government, and when one was established education remained with the constituent states. The University of Berlin had an advantage coming from its position in the largest and most powerful German state. Munich had the advantage of being supported by a wealthy kingdom. After the formation of the Reich, the University of Berlin had the additional advantage of being located in the capital of the Reich. Nevertheless, there were very distinguished scholars and scientists in nearly all German universities and nearly all of them had their acknowledged charms.

The Ascendancy of Paris

The primacy of Parisian educational institutions was inherent in the Napoleonic reforms of French education; Napoleon's system set the

structural basis that persisted in French education even after the legislation of 1968, which purported to change the pattern. His focus was on the *lycées*. The faculties which comprehended related disciplines were the closest thing to what were universities in other countries, but they were not grouped locally into a university. The various faculties in each department had a common administration which they shared with the secondary schools of that department. All were grouped together into an "academy". Particularly because of the humiliating defeat of 1870, leading politicians and educators of the early Third Republic considered it urgent to create a university system with faculties joined together into universities on what was mainly the German model.¹

Reformers like Louis Liard, originally a teacher of philosophy and later the official responsible for universities in the Ministry of Education, at first thought that four or five great universities could be created in the provinces, each rivalling Paris and becoming more or less independent centres of science and scholarship.² Liard spoke of the provinces' acquisition of a share of the intellectual glory hitherto reserved for Paris. He cited Guizot as a voice in the dark, dreaming of four excellent provincial universities, and Paris ceasing to be "the pit where so many minds capable of a more useful life and worthy of a better fate come to be swallowed up".³ From these four or five intellectual capitals, as Jules Simon called them, science would infiltrate the masses and public spirit would attain new heights. The isolation of provincial academics would cease, and new masters, fully enlightened, would spread new ideals throughout France.⁴

All this ignored some real problems. The first was their financial straits. In the 1870s certain provincial faculties were starting almost from nothing, and Liard himself emphasized their "material poverty" as a major problem.⁵ Even after the law of 1896 creating or ratifying the existence of provincial universities, financial support was still mostly local and nearly always scanty. The handicaps which this poverty imposed on research, together with the absence of corporate spirit and low prestige, rendered the provincial universities unattractive. "Only Paris and the *grandes écoles* (after 1896) were financially well off. Paris compared well with Berlin, but the French

¹ See Moody, Joseph N., *French Education since Napoleon* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1978); Prost, Antoine, *Histoire de l'enseignement en France, 1800-1967* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1968); Weisz, George, "The Academic Elite and the Movement to Reform Higher Education, 1850-1885", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, State University of New York at Stony Brook, 1976; Clark, Terry N., *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973) and Keylor, William N., *Academy and Community: The Foundation of the French Historical Profession* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973); also relevant sections of Ringer, Fritz K., *Education and Society in Modern Europe* (Bloomington, Indiana and London: Indiana University Press, 1979).

² Liard, Louis, *L'Enseignement supérieur en France 1789-1893* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1894), vol. II, p. 133.

³ Liard, Louis, *Enseignement supérieur: Introduction à la 4^{ème} statistique de l'enseignement supérieur* (Paris: no publisher, 1902), p. vi.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. viii, ix.

⁵ Liard, Louis, "Les Universités françaises" in *Special Reports on Education in France* (London: Wyman, 1899), p. 577. In 1874 there were only six professors in the entire faculty of letters of Bordeaux. *Ibid.*, p. 578.

provincial universities could not match their counterparts in Germany, Britain, or the United States.”⁶ Although local patronage helped to diminish the gap, especially in scientific research, it did not close it. Furthermore, in some provincial universities, such as Nancy or Grenoble, the financial support provided by private patrons governed the choice of particular research topics and sometimes made scientists in the provinces feel that they were being placed in the undignified position of menial subordination.

In fact a certain dispersion of talent was inevitable when politicians by the law of 1896 created or ratified the existence of 15 provincial universities, rather than the four or five major centres which had been proposed. This was done partly to satisfy local and regional desires.⁷ But the decision was accompanied by an utter lack of interest in enabling provincial academics to come closer to the distinction attained in Paris. The politicians and educational administrators were content to allow the provincial universities to remain in a state of mediocrity, with an occasional bright spot in one faculty or another. This situation inhibited the growth of corporate spirit among the professors in provincial institutions. Excellent work was certainly done by provincial academics, but it could not undo the attractive power of Paris. The attractiveness of Paris was by no means diminished by the creation of the provincial universities.

The Sorbonne was the most comprehensive of universities in its coverage of the whole range of scientific and scholarly disciplines. In all the provincial universities there were lacunae. As late as 1900, physiology was taught at Lyon, but not at Nancy and Lille. Even in the study of locally interesting subjects, like Burgundian regionalism, it is significant that most major works after 1880 were published in Parisian journals or by publishers in Paris, and not in Dijon.⁸

The whole cast of the Third Republic continued to favour Paris. In the speeches of politicians after 1870 the major ideals were solidarity, concentration, *rapprochement* and unity; these were ideals which assumed the value of centralisation rather than decentralisation. The value of regional culture and the devotion of resources for the development of the intellectual life of the regions was obviously slighted by such an outlook. This too helps to account for the concentration of attention and resources on the Sorbonne.⁹ Especially before 1914, Republicans detested “particularism” which meant regionalism or care for one’s own region or town of origin. It was France as a whole which was to be given affection and this was symbolised by Paris.

⁶ Cohen, Habiba, S., *Elusive Reform: The French Universities, 1968–1978* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1978), p. 9. In 1914 the Paris faculty of sciences received funds from the government totalling 247,749 francs; its nearest competitor, the same faculty of the University of Rennes, received only 66,465 francs. See Guirault, Arthur, “Les Universités françaises pendant la guerre”, *Revue internationale de l’enseignement*, LXXVIII (1924), p. 231.

⁷ On genesis of the law of 1896 and the ideas of Louis Liard, in particular, see Bruneau, William, “The French Facultés and Universities 1870–1902,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1977.

⁸ See Drouard, Alain, *Analyse comparative des processus du changement et des mouvements des réformes de l’enseignement supérieur français* (Paris: CNRS, 1978), p. 74.

⁹ See Bruneau, W., *op. cit.* See also Singer, Barnett, *Modern France: Mind, Politics, Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), ch. 1.

The law of 1896 failed to realise the wishes of the reformers; in the words of Professor Moody, "the dispersal of talents did not produce the great regional centres envisioned by Liard, sharing with Paris in influence over French culture".¹⁰ Instead the "New Sorbonne" became the crown of the edifice—the great achievement of the Third Republic; it had 17,000 students at the turn of the century. These students, including those of the École normale which became associated with the Sorbonne in 1903, made up at least 40 per cent. of the total in France, and they were generally regarded as being the best in the country. Charles Seignobos, in a letter to Ernest Lavisse, deplored the lack of able students at Dijon, where he taught before coming to Paris. And René Benjamin as late as the 1920s said of students assembling for entry to the Sorbonne on the rue St. Jacques: "There assembled the best students from the best *lycées*."¹¹

The Sorbonne gained another advantage from being in Paris. It gave opportunities for Jewish professors to teach there and for Jews who were not academics to play a part in entering the intellectual life of Paris. This is something else Paris had over the provinces, especially after 1900. Durkheim and Marcel Mauss, Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Léon Brunschvig, not to mention Bergson at the Collège de France and the half-Jew Élie Halévy, form the head of an impressive list. Without Durkheim and Mauss there would have been no *Année sociologique*. Halévy and Xavier Léon founded the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. Jewish publishers like Félix Alcan and Calmann-Lévy, who were important publishers of learned works, added greatly to the intellectual animation of Parisian life.¹²

The ascendancy of the Sorbonne is evident from a small survey of 50 distinguished French academics: 40 had come to Paris and remained there, most at the Sorbonne. The ten provincials listed include a rector at the University of Lyon; a dean of the *faculté catholique* of Strasbourg; a director of the Observatoire at Besançon; a professor of law at Dijon who is also listed as "*ancien ministre*" and "*membre de l'Institut*"; a rector of the academy of Clermont, who had had a professional career; a rector of the academy of Dijon and a geologist in Madagascar. Only three of the 50 were provincial professors. One of these taught the history of literature and archaeology at Bordeaux, another taught medicine at Lyon and the third history at Nancy.¹³ In death as in life the same rule applied. Obituaries of Parisian professors published in the *Revue internationale de l'enseignement* from 1920 to 1939 outnumbered those of provincial professors by a ratio of about two to one.

¹⁰ Moody, Joseph N., *op. cit.*, p. 113.

¹¹ Weisz, George, "The French Universities and Education for the New Professions, 1885–1914: An Episode in French University Reform", *Minerva*, XVII (January 1979), p. 102; Seignobos' letter in Lavisse papers, Bibliothèque nationale; and Benjamin, René, *La Farce de la Sorbonne* (Paris: Fayard, 1921), p. 10.

¹² See Gilson, Étienne, *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 31–38 and Greenberg, L. M., "Bergson and Durkheim as Sons and Assimilators: The Early Years", *French Historical Studies*, IX (Fall 1976), pp. 619–634.

¹³ The designations of profession and rank in the *Dictionnaire biographique français contemporain*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Pharos, 1954), are themselves expressive of the deference given to the Sorbonne. The term

Parisian Opportunities

Resources for research in Paris were immense. The Bibliothèque nationale was of course incomparably better than the libraries in French towns or cities of the provinces. The Bibliothèque Ste. Geneviève and other more specialised libraries were also useful. For historians, the Archives nationales had more importance than departmental archives, which were restricted by region and subject-matter and which were, in general, little used before about 1930, partly because they were poorly calendared. All the dissertations done in France were also housed in Paris. The great *lycées* too had respectable libraries. Budgets for libraries in Paris were higher, gifts of books more munificent than in the provinces. The more specialised fields of research were usually easier to pursue in Paris than at provincial institutions. By 1930, the Sorbonne had the largest Scandinavian library outside Scandinavia. Special institutes covered most disciplines and were headed by distinguished scholars in the field. Examples include the Institut d'ethnologie, the Institut d'études sémitiques, the Institut scandinave, the Institut de psychologie and the Centre de documentation sociale. These institutions usually had libraries of their own. The library of the Centre de documentation sociale was established in 1935 by Albert Kahn, a great benefactor of the Sorbonne, and it contained hundreds of journals and specialised works of reference as well as 6,000 books in the social sciences. Philanthropic institutions such as the Rockefeller Foundation generally donated books and journals to these central repositories.

Parisian professors had more opportunity to speak at public functions than provincial professors. There were more opportunities to go abroad themselves than was the case with provincial professors.¹⁴ At international colloquia, where professors from the Sorbonne outnumbered those from the provinces, the cachet of the Sorbonne was always known and appreciated; that of Grenoble or Nancy was not. For example, as late as 1964, at the Eleutherian Mills Colloquium for scholars in French history, all the scholars from France whose papers were chosen for publication were from the Sorbonne: Marcel Reinhard, Ernest Labrousse, Louis Girard, Jacques Droz, Roger Portal and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle.

Professors at the Sorbonne were also regarded as being among the best in France. They had often earned a reputation for intellectual achievement in the provinces and were later "called" to Paris. It was Paris which gained the glory of their pre-Parisian achievements. In Paris they could exert influence over higher education throughout France. Professors at the Sorbonne had abundant contacts and places in the Ministry of Education and links to deputies in the Chamber. Ferdinand Buisson, a professor of education at the

"*professeur à la Sorbonne*" is used for eminent professors included here; for the few provincials in the sample, it is simply "*professeur*".

¹⁴ After the First World War, David Weill granted the Sorbonne 30,000 francs annually to permit ten professors to take sabbatical years abroad. Foreign governments also endowed chairs or provided for exchanges with the Sorbonne. See Laird, L., *Les Bienfaiteurs de l'Université de Paris* (Paris: no publisher, 1913), pp. 6-17.

Sorbonne, became a Minister of Public Instruction. The philosophical works on education by Buisson and by Gabriel Séailles, who was also at the Sorbonne, on philosophy, helped define the educational philosophy of the Third Republic. Certain text books written by professors of the Sorbonne were chosen by the Ministry for use all over France. These text books for secondary and primary schools, especially in history, gave certain professors national influence; such, for example, were the *Petit Lavissee* and the history text books by Alphonse Aulard who held the chair of the history of the French Revolution at the Sorbonne. *Sorbonnards* were in positions of influence in science policy in the capital. A prime example is Jean Perrin, who occupied a chair in physical chemistry at the Sorbonne and won a Nobel Prize in 1926. In the 1930s Perrin urged Léon Blum to create a position for science in the cabinet. He made representations for increased financial support for research and was the principal instigator of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique which was established in 1939.¹⁵

Sorbonne professors exercised influence over the *lycées* of the entire country by setting examinations and supervising the marking for the *agrégations*. Eminent professors of the Sorbonne were usually chosen to prepare the general report on the annual examinations to the government and to render the *Sorbonnards'* judgement on the performance of the products of university teaching throughout the country. In 1936, for example, Léon Brunschwig, chairman of the board of examiners in philosophy, concluded his report by noting "much phraseology, which badly conceals a lack of personal meditation". Garnier-Pagès in history, after speaking of the better candidates, deplored a tendency to "store in the memory the greatest number of facts possible on the different questions in the programme". Others, like Ferdinand Lot, made more philosophical and wide-ranging statements concerning the relationship of the *agrégation* and the country's level of culture. Lot found the *agrégation* too mechanical, and inimical to the development of a true French culture. In this way, among many others, professors of the Sorbonne were placed in positions which permitted them to render authoritative and even official judgements on the performance of universities throughout the country. They were the arbiters and custodians of academic standards.¹⁶

Sorbonne professors also were the supervisors and examiners of doctoral dissertations on which teachers in the provincial *lycées* and faculties worked.

¹⁵ On Buisson, see Singer, B., *op. cit.*, ch. 2; on Lavissee, see Nora, Pierre, "Ernest Lavissee: son rôle dans la formation du sentiment national", *Revue historique*, CCXXVIII (July–September 1962), pp. 73–106. See also Ozouf, Jacques and Ozouf, Mona, "Le Thème du patriotisme dans les manuels primaires", *Le Mouvement social* XLIX (October–December, 1964), pp. 5–32; on Perrin, see Nye, Mary Jo, *Molecular Reality: A Perspective on the Scientific Work of Jean Perrin* (London: Macdonald, 1972), pp. 56–59.

¹⁶ Brunschwig, Léon, "Rapport sur l'agrégation de philosophie (1936)", *Revue universitaire*, XLVI (1937), pp. 289–297; Pagès-Garnier, "Rapport sur le concours de l'agrégation d'histoire et de géographie (1936)", *ibid.*, p. 214. Normaliens took most of the highest places in the *agrégations* in literature and philosophy. In 1912, 26 of 109 candidates passed in *lettres*, but percentages of successes grew higher by the 1930s. See Puesch, A., "Rapport sur le concours de l'agrégation des lettres (1921)", *Revue universitaire*, XXXI (1922), p. 331. Lot's critique of the *agrégation* was published in Péguy's *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, serie 7, XI (1906).

Most doctoral theses, and almost all of those which gained high esteem, were done under the control of the Sorbonne. In a list of 200 of the main dissertations in the humanities and social sciences for the period of 1870–1940, only ten are clearly identified as the product of provincial universities, including Paul Hazard's distinguished thesis defended at Lyon in 1910. The *doctorat* and *thèse complémentaire* taken together, constituted an onerous doctoral requirement, especially after 1900. The leading theses produced at the Sorbonne, distinguished by meticulous documentation as well as intellectual originality, set trends in all disciplines. Some became classic works of scholarship when they were published. In geography this was true of the dissertations written for the Sorbonne by Jean Brunhès, Emmanuel de Martonne and Raoul Blanchard; in the history of art, Émile Mâle's *L'Art religieux du XIII^{ème} siècle en France* (1899) was an illustrious example; in history, Georges Lefebvre's *Les Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française* (1924) and Ferdinand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II* (1947–48); in philosophy Henri Bergson's *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889), Étienne Gilson's *La Doctrine cartésienne de la liberté* (1913) and Raymond Aron's *Essai sur une théorie de l'histoire dans l'Allemagne contemporaine* (1938); in anthropology and sociology, Claude Lévi-Strauss' *Les Structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1947–48). Most of these were published in Paris, by important houses such as Hachette, Alcan—later the Presses universitaires de France—Champion, Vrin, and Armand Colin, intensifying their influence. (In the list of 200 theses cited above, only 15 were published in the provinces or abroad. Not until after the Second World War did presses such as Arrault in Tours, Arthaud in Grenoble, and Privat in Toulouse gain a slightly larger share of the market.¹⁷)

The Sorbonne, because it was in Paris, offered a great variety of opportunities for additional income and influence to members of its teaching staff. As well as book publishers, almost all the major journals and editors were located in Paris. Almost all the editors of the main academic journals before 1940 taught at the Sorbonne. The proximity of the 15 *grandes écoles*, the Collège de France and other specialised institutes, the great *lycées*, and institutions for discussion right down to the famous cafés of the *rive gauche*, all intensified intellectual stimulation. The *Revue des deux mondes*, the *Revue de Paris* and the *Revue politique et parlementaire* provided both outlets for ideas and contacts for *Sorbonnards*. In the neighbourhood of the Sorbonne itself a “bewildering galaxy of publications” came into existence from the time of the Dreyfus Affair, making this area an “overcrowded editorial centre”.¹⁸ Professors associated themselves with important period-

¹⁷ Des Places, Édouard, “Cent cinquante ans du doctorat ès lettres (1810–1960)”, *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, XXVIII (1969), pp. 209–228.

¹⁸ Suleiman, Ezra N., *Elites in French Society: The Politics of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). A survey of French learned journals for 1939, including *Revue d'histoire littéraire de France*, the *Revue de philologie*, the *Revue des études historiques*, *Annales de géographie*, and a variety of scientific journals showed that their editors were all located in Paris, either at the Sorbonne or the École des

icals and groups of the Dreyfusard era, such as Charles Péguy's *Cahiers de la quinzaine* and the Ligue des droits de l'homme.

The importance of Paris as the centre of political life and of the publicistic activities around politics offered opportunities to teachers of the Sorbonne which were not so easily available to teachers in the provincial universities. The names of those who successfully drew on these opportunities resounded throughout France. Professors in provincial universities had few such opportunities for fame or income. Politics at the centre were remote from them.

Possibilities for intellectual and quasi-intellectual activities outside the university were incommensurably greater in Paris than in the provinces. Professors such as Buisson, Séailles, and Charles Gide, the economist, followed the path taken by Victor Cousin, Arago or Gay-Lussac in an earlier generation. The career of Albert Bayet shows well the opportunities that Paris provided for the professor of the Sorbonne. Bayet, who was appointed to a chair in sociology at the Sorbonne, also became president of the Fédération nationale de la presse, president of the important laic pressure group, the Ligue française de l'enseignement, and just after the First World War collaborated with Clemenceau on the newspaper *L'Homme libre*. He later wrote for or directed other newspapers and became secretary-general of the Union rationaliste. Maurice Levaillant, who became a professor of modern French literature at the Sorbonne and the École normale just before the First World War, wrote a column on literature for the *Figaro littéraire* between 1910 and 1934. He also wrote for other important publications such as the *Revue des deux mondes*. Henri Poincaré wrote general, more or less popular works on scientific method while in the capital.¹⁹

Few academic figures could take as much advantage of the opportunities offered by the Sorbonne as Ernest Lavisse did at the height of his career in the era of the Dreyfus Affair. A "super-maître", Lavisse "reigned over everything, presided over everything", as one of his students, Jules Isaac, wrote. At the Sorbonne he had a powerful voice in the direction of historical studies. He became director of the École normale. In the publishing world he had important connections with Hachette and Armand Colin. He had links to the Ministry of Education. And, continues Isaac, "they listened to him like an oracle on the Quai d'Orsay". In the principal salons, especially that of Princess Mathilde, he was also well known.²⁰

Parisian academics could, in addition to the exercise of influence, earn extra income. They could do this not only through royalties on their

hautes études. See also Silvera, Alain, *A Gentleman-Commoner in the Third Republic: Daniel Halévy and his Times* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 44.

¹⁹ On Arago and Gay-Lussac see Fox, Robert, "Scientific Enterprise and the Patronage of Research in France 1800-1870", *Minerva*, XI (October 1973), pp. 442-473. On the activities engaged in by Buisson, Séailles, and Gide, see Elwitt, Sanford, "Education and the Social Questions: The Universités Populaires in Late Nineteenth Century France", *History of Education Quarterly*, XXII (Spring 1982), pp. 60-61. On Bayet and Levaillant, see *Dictionnaire biographique français contemporain*, pp. 63 and 412.

²⁰ See Isaac, Jules, *Expériences de ma vie* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1960), vol. I, p. 266; and Nora, Pierre, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

publications but also by holding simultaneously several remunerative posts in the capital; this is what the French call *cumul*. Examples of *cumulards* can be drawn from the sample of 50 eminent academics. In 1954 René Abrard, a geologist, held posts both at the École pratique des hautes études and the Muséum d'histoire naturelle. Paul Becquerel taught at the Sorbonne and held a post at the Muséum as well. Pierre Auger was professor of physics at the Sorbonne and director of the department of science for UNESCO. (In an earlier period Gabriel Lippmann, the Sorbonne physicist, had held two positions and one of his colleagues held four.)

To Those that Have Shall be Given

Collectors of books and artefacts, if they wished to donate their collections to an institution, thought first of Paris, since Paris had the best developed collections to which one could donate. The explorer Foureau left his collections of rocks and minerals from the Sahara to the faculty of sciences. Professor Dereims left his fossils from the Andes; Mme. Pierre Aubry, in memory of her husband, left a large personal library related to the history of music. In medicine especially, and in pharmacology it made sense to endow the University of Paris which already had large collections. Gifts of cinematographic equipment and a whole Archive de la parole—old gramophone records—was donated by Émile Pathé to the Sorbonne.²¹

In Paris, already established academics could meet eminent foreign scholars. The Sorbonne and Paris were centres for exchanges and international conferences and colloquia. Financial support for such purposes came from the Ministries of Public Instruction and of Commerce and Industry. Not only did foreign scholars go to Paris to be enriched intellectually; so did provincial scholars, especially in the sciences.

A great advantage enjoyed by the professors of the Sorbonne was the lobbying of professor-administrators who benefited from that peculiar French combination of politics and education that centred in Paris. The archetype was Louis Liard. When he became *director de l'enseignement supérieur* in the era of Jules Ferry, he had one foot in the Sorbonne and the other in the Chambre des députés, with which he maintained close ties for two decades. Liard became a propagandist for the universities and he was reasonably successful in this. At the university level, he reformed curricula, procured municipal funds for chairs at the Sorbonne—the Paris municipal council established the chair of the history of the French Revolution and one in the theory of evolution—and he obtained governmental subsidies for important journals and institutions, such as Count de Chambrun's *Musée sociale*. He raised much money for the Sorbonne, in particular; he had connections with the French upper classes and the richest industrialists.

²¹ See Beaulieu, Charles, "Les Bibliothèques universitaires françaises", *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, VIII (May–June, 1933), pp. 237–268; Bouglé, C., "L'Organisation de la recherche sociale en France", *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XI (May–June, 1936), pp. 225–233; Fox, Robert, "La Société zoologique de France. Ses origines, ses premières années", *Bulletin de la société zoologique de France* CI (1976), pp. 808–809; and Liard, Louis, *L'Université de Paris* (Paris: Renouard-H., Laurens, 1909), pp. 103–112.

Contributions came from men such as Raphael Bischoffsheim, who endowed an observatory on the Mediterranean for the Sorbonne, and Basil Zaharoff, who endowed a chair in aerodynamics. Because of Liard's persuasiveness, Mme. Arconati-Visconti left her fortune of some 17,000,000 francs to the Sorbonne. The Rothschilds were also prominent contributors.²²

Special perquisites were available to professors at the Sorbonne. For example, in 1930 the Duc de Richelieu presented the Château de Richelieu in the Loire valley not to a university of the West, but rather as a place of rest for members of the staff of the Sorbonne.²³

Liard's definition of what constituted the prosperity of a university in the capital and its opportunities was in part quantitative. Thus he considered the numbers of buildings, professors, students, doctorates—and even their length—as achievements. But his reports and books also emphasized the spirit of unity the Sorbonne could be expected to produce, and the possibilities of universal thought there.

Official identification with the Sorbonne, and being surrounded by so many eminent colleagues, must have enhanced the subjective sense of identification with the institution. On lecture panels colleagues greeted each other as "*mon savant collègue*". Celebrated members of the literary world also validated one's status as "*professeur à la Sorbonne*". It may not have been common, but the sight of Paul Valéry stealing into one of Gustave Cohen's classes at the Sorbonne could not have occurred in the provinces.

Official occasions, such as the *rentrées solennelles*, had more *éclat* than similar ceremonies in the provinces and they probably enhanced corporate sentiments within the university. Particularly impressive was the inauguration of the buildings of the New Sorbonne in 1889. Rectors from the provincial *académies*, inspectors-general, deans of faculties, 55 foreign delegations of professors, professors in the Sorbonne and those from the famous Paris *lycées* marched in procession, all in academic robes. Three former ministers of public instruction—Jules Simon, Victor Duruy, and Jules Ferry—delivered orations, as did the President of the Republic. The Sorbonne, in the idiom of the religion of science of the Third Republic, was said to be the "*cité libre des esprits, laboratoire des idées, sanctuaire de la pensée nationale*".²⁴

The Sorbonne became the scene of a national ritual, a ritual which consecrated not only the universal validity of science but also the hearth of France. At one *rentrée solennelle*, the rector, Paul Lapie, after introducing Lord Rutherford of Cambridge, Paul Vinogradoff of Oxford, E. R. A. Seligman of Columbia, and other visiting scholars to be honoured, commented on this "*belle famille de grands esprits . . .*"²⁵

²² Liard, L., *op. cit.*, pp. 14 and 36; and Weisz, *op. cit.*, (1979), pp. 103 and 109.

²³ *The Times Educational Supplement*, no. 776 (15 March, 1930), p. 118.

²⁴ Ziegler, Gillette, *Le Défi de la Sorbonne: sept siècles de contestation* (Paris: Juilliard, 1969), p. 151.

²⁵ Lapie, Paul in *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, I (March 1926), pp. 2–28. Lapie also cited professors of science in the provinces who envied the Sorbonne for its laboratory assistance.

Dispersed though the Sorbonne was in a spatial sense, in contrast with the relatively compact campuses of American and British universities, it still called forth the loyalty of many of its members. Certain professors gave large gifts to the Sorbonne. Very few can have been as generous as Jules Flammermont, a professor of history at Lille, but a graduate of the Sorbonne, who on his death left his entire fortune of 76,408 francs for loans to students in modern history at the Sorbonne significantly, not Lille. Less munificent was the gift of Alexandre Beljame, professor at the faculty of letters of the Sorbonne, who gave it the royalties of one of his books to aid students of English.²⁶

The Craving for Paris: Academic Careers

One will never know how many members of the academic profession “craved” an appointment in Paris—or how strong that craving was. In general, however, it is evident that the pattern of French academic careers came to fulfilment in an appointment in Paris.²⁷ This created a type of occupational odyssey without parallel in other Western countries.

The career of many professors at the Sorbonne began in a provincial town or even village; the bright boy would be discovered by the village schoolmaster and coached for an attempt to ascend the academic ladder. The boy would attend a *lycée* as a *boursier* in a major town of his *département* and would then frequently enter by competition one of the great Paris *lycées*, like Henri IV or Louis-le-Grand, which prepared him for possible entry to the Sorbonne or a *grande école*, such as the *École normale*. These provincials came to Paris with a feeling of leaving behind what was retrograde and inferior. For Albert Thibaudet, who became a very important literary historian and critic, *boursiers* entering the great *lycées* or the Sorbonne were the Rastignacs of the Third Republic. (He himself was one.) It was bracing to feel oneself part of the scholastic “*gratin de la province*”. Jules Lagneau, reminiscing on his own odyssey from a poor family background in Lorraine to a Paris *concours*—he entered one of the great *lycées* and then the *École normale*—noted: “Those from the provinces are always on the bottom when arriving, either due to home-sickness or timidity; but at the end of three months, it is always those from the provinces who are at the head of the classes and so, I hoped to do the same.”²⁸ A generation later in 1914, Pierre Gaxotte also came from Lorraine to a great Paris *lycée* and then the *École normale*. Gaxotte wrote: “It was one thing to win the prize of excellence at Bar-le-Duc [which was the prefecture town where the provincial *lycée* was

²⁶ Liard, L., *L'Université de Paris*, pp. 103–112.

²⁷ *Dictionnaire biographique français*, Nye, Mary Jo, “The Scientific Periphery in France: The Faculty of Sciences at Toulouse (1880–1930)”, *Minerva*, XIII (Autumn 1975), p. 383.

²⁸ Canivez, André, *Jules Lagneau: Professeur de philosophie. Essai sur la condition du professeur de philosophie jusqu'à la fin du XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1965), vol. II, p. 308; Thibaudet cited by Curtius, Ernst R., *The Civilization of France* (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 207.

situated]. It was quite another to be placed in a good rank in Paris. It took me a while to climb the rungs of the ladder one by one."²⁹

For gifted students from the provinces, Paris offered a dazzling variety of possibilities. Most obviously it provided contacts at these superior institutions. Each great *lycée* had its own literary review and around these reviews friendships were formed. The *École normale* solidified such friendships, or fostered new ones. Institutions such as the *École normale* were far more than just educational facilities; they constituted a new world. Romain Rolland's journal of his years there shows this as his most significant period of literary and philosophical development.³⁰ It was easier in Paris to acquire a first-hand acquaintance with philosophical fashions and an immediate sense of political events than in other towns. Louis Gillet discussed the impact of Paris on the *lycéens* of around 1880: "How to imagine the life of these youths without sports, bicycles, cinemas? . . . A generation confined to several cafés . . ., [reading] Taine, Renan, Littré, Darwin, Spencer, Fustel de Coulanges, Renouvier, and believing itself master of the world . . . One made friends. Groups formed. One knew who would be famous." Gaxotte, who made a career as a non-academic historian, as a student in a later generation, took walks with the publisher Arthème Fayard and had stimulating discussions. "He gave me anecdotes about Paris, he explained it to me," said Gaxotte. Early on, he met Jacques Bainville, Charles Maurras, and other leaders of the reactionary group which he later joined, just as others became socialists under the influence of Charles Péguy and Lucien Herr, the librarian of the *École normale*. In the period just after the First World War, Robert Aron had experiences similar to Gaxotte's. As a student at the Sorbonne he organised lectures and personally invited famous figures like Jean Cocteau and Erik Satie. Robert Brasillach, the future collaborator in the Second World War, wrote of the *lycée* Louis-le-Grand in the mid-1920s, "where I knew so many joys, the discovery of the world, the discovery of Paris, the discussions, the fever of youth, friendships"³¹

Once having graduated from the Sorbonne or the *École normale supérieure* and obtained the *agrégation*, the future professor at the Sorbonne would normally return to the provinces to teach at a faculty or more often at a *lycée*, while working on a *doctorat*. Their teaching loads—a maximum of 12 hours—were light enough to give them time for research;

²⁹ Gaxotte, Pierre, *Les Autres et moi* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), p. 17.

³⁰ The following books have good sections on the formation of common values at the most eminent secondary schools, on school reviews, on literary cliques and on the passage to Normale: Silvera, Alain, *op. cit.*; Blanchard, Raoul, *Ma Jeunesse sous l'aile de Péguy* (Paris: Fayard, 1960); Mallet, Robert (ed.), *Self-Portraits: The Gide-Valéry Letters, 1890-1942* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966); Siprio, Pierre (ed.), *Cette Ame ardente: Choix de lettres de André Saurès à Romain Rolland: 1887-1891* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1954); Schalk, David, *Roger Martin du Gard: The Novelist and History* (Ithaca: N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), p. 25; and Maritain, Raïssa, *We Have Been Friends Together* (New York: Longman's, 1946).

³¹ Gillet, Louis, *Gabriel Hanotaux* (Paris: Plon, 1933), pp. 38-39; Gaxotte, P., *op. cit.*, p. 108; Aron, Robert, *Fragments d'une vie* (Paris: Plon, 1981), pp. 34-35; and Brasillach cited in Smith, Robert J., *The École Normale supérieure and the Third Republic* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 22.

they therefore had the opportunity to write themselves out of a dull post. *Maîtres-répétiteurs* helped with marking, and *censeurs* looked after discipline.

Gaxotte tells what it was like for a bright young *agrégé*, a graduate of the *École normale*, to begin his teaching career in a provincial *lycée* just after the First World War. In this *lycée* town he had only the other *professeurs* to communicate with or the prefect of the *département*, himself a kind of prisoner in the provinces, unable to visit Paris without the consent of the Minister of the Interior. Nevertheless Gaxotte appreciated the quiet of the provinces. On the whole he liked his colleagues, most of whom were Normans who would stay there the rest of their lives. He enjoyed training the brightest students who, like himself, might later conquer Paris. Teaching 12 hours a week to a small number of students, he had time for other interests. He was not discontented, and eventually expected to complete his dissertation and move up to an appointment as *maître de conférences* in a provincial faculty at Besançon, Caen or Nancy. Things turned out otherwise, partly because he continued to visit Paris and met many persons there; he spent as many as three days a week there. Paris in the early 1920s was “*une ville merveilleuse*”. Gaxotte lists the great writers he heard about or saw, the painters and the composers. “Young then, we had the feeling of living a prodigious, an exalted renaissance . . .”. And those “movements [of the avant-garde] only arrived in my prefecture town in a sleepy, stealthy fashion”.³²

Raoul Blanchard, another *normalien* of an earlier time, was also quite happy to teach in a provincial *lycée* after the excitement of Paris. As he notes, his three years at the *École normale* were the most agreeable of his life. But it was time to “change air”. “Timidly I indicated my preferences”. He wanted something more earthy; a *lycée* as near as possible to Orléans. Blanchard wished to be near his family and work on the geography of his native region. But the Ministry of Education did not comply with his wishes. Instead he taught at Douai, in 1900, two and a half hours by express train from Paris. Even this was a choice post. There he found a subject for his dissertation and then he too rose rapidly into the ranks of university teaching as a geographer.³³

Lycée teachers who wanted to ascend in the university system, even had they been content to settle in a provincial university, usually had to travel to Paris in the summer and stay in a cheap hotel in order to use the great libraries or archives, and to keep in touch with the supervisors of their dissertation at the Sorbonne. It was advisable to be visible and to keep future examination committees aware of one's existence.

After the *doctorat*—which many did not complete—one would soon cease teaching at a *lycée* to take up an appointment at one of the smaller faculties in the provinces. Good teaching and scholarship allowed one to rise to

³² Gaxotte, P., *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 149 and 150.

³³ Blanchard, R., *op. cit.*, p. 237.

major provincial universities and cities, such as Lyon or Toulouse. Then, if the doctoral dissertation made a very good impression and if one was reputed to be an excellent teacher and if a Parisian professorship became vacant through death or retirement, one finally returned to the Sorbonne—almost always over the age of 40—not as a professor but rather as a *maître de conférences*, since a person already established in Paris moved into the professorship. Once there, the promotion to a full professorship usually came within a few years.

Professors of high quality and ambition, who were teaching in the provinces, often set their sights on Paris. In 1880, Ernest Bersot noted a “fever of the doctorate”, the doctoral labours being essential for the return to Paris. This “ambition for the faculties and love of [academic] work” constituted “one of the forms of the love of Paris, which takes many forms”.³⁴ It was not only that one would be less isolated there, but also a matter of prestige—prestige which often exaggerated reality. In science, as one commentator notes, “professional ambitions continued to be focused on the capital, even though by the end of the nineteenth century the material advantages offered by Paris—for example, in research facilities—had diminished relative to the provincial institutions”.³⁵

Certain academics made their best and most original contributions while in “exile”, through meeting the requirements of the *doctorat d'état*. In fields such as geology or geography subjects for dissertations and subsequent books and articles came from the area where one taught. Théodore Lefebvre, younger brother of the historian, found his “geographical curiosity awakened” at his first post in the *lycée* of Pau. He drew on the resources of the region for his doctoral thesis, *Les Modes de vie dans les Pyrénées atlantiques orientales*, which helped get him a post in geography at the University of Poitiers, where he continued to write on regional subjects until his deportation and murder by the Nazis in 1943. Albert Thibaudet held that a professor could be of more cultural importance in a town like Lyon, where almost no well-known writers could compete with them, than in Paris.³⁶ This view is an adequate account of *petits professeurs* in the provinces. It does not, however, apply to outstanding scholars like Durkheim or Lavissee.

Rapid ascent to a Parisian post was rare because the leading educational politicians as well as the Parisian professors wanted to keep it that way. Émile Durkheim emphasized the gradual process of becoming *magistral*, of

³⁴ Bersot, Ernest, *Questions d'enseignement: Études sur les réformes universitaires* (Paris: Hachette, 1880), p. 309. Bersot comments on the great excitement of student life in Paris, followed by the *stage* in the provinces where teachers find “few or no books, few or no men, students who aren't interested in their interests . . . [They risk] falling asleep forever.” *Ibid.*, p. 307.

³⁵ See Karady, V., “Educational Qualifications and University Careers in Science in Nineteenth Century France”, in Fox, R., and Weisz, G. (eds.) *The Organization of Science and Technology in France 1808–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 99. On professional ambitions see Karady, V., “L'Expansion universitaire et l'évolution des inégalités devant la carrière d'enseignant au début de la III^e République”, *Revue française de sociologie*, IV (October–December 1973), pp. 443–470.

³⁶ *Annales de géographie*, LVI, 4 (1947), p. 309; Thibaudet, Albert, *La République des professeurs* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1927).

acquiring *autorité scientifique*, and of only then moving on to Paris. Durkheim writes: "As a post in Paris is, for all sorts of reasons, very much sought, it is completely exceptional that one begin there. Teachers who are called to the University of Paris have begun by teaching for a more or less long time at a university in one of the *départements*; they have already proven themselves as professors and scholars."³⁷

The Journey to Paris

The journey back to Paris often took the greater part of a lifetime, and many scholars and teachers chafed while awaiting the call. This was the case with Jules Lagneau. His provincial posts as a teacher in a *lycée* took him to rather mournful towns like Sens and also to Nancy, the latter celebrated as the *lycée* of Maurice Barrès, whom Lagneau taught and by whom he was later caricatured in *Les Déracinés*. His poor health and his pedestrian teaching kept him there. Nevertheless he aspired to a Parisian post. At a number of inspections he demanded a transfer to the capital, and he finally got one just before he died; his biographer speculates that he would have lived a few years longer had he been appointed to Paris earlier.³⁸

Some of the talented young scholars of the University of Bordeaux who began their careers there in about 1880 aspired to Parisian positions. These men, who included Émile Durkheim, Achille Luchaire, Louis Liard and Victor Egger were all eventually appointed in the capital, either in teaching or in the educational administration. One, Henri Couat, became rector of the Académie de Caen.³⁹ But while they were in Bordeaux, they did contribute to its cultural life. Local reviews were founded, and their voices were added to the campaign for the erection of new buildings. But persons like Liard and Durkheim who wished to become proponents of theories of universal validity or who wished to influence national life, found that an appointment in Paris was indispensable.

For such reasons a number of scholars in the provincial system eschewed teaching to live as freelance men of letters in Paris: for example, Gaxotte, who became a popular historian, or Jules Lemaître, who had taught at Besançon and Grenoble before becoming a famous literary critic in the capital. Jean Jaurès had been a *maître de conférences* in the faculty of letters of Toulouse before becoming a deputy for the Tarn, which led him to a position of great influence in Paris.⁴⁰ Paris, in other words, offered opportunities to talented scholars and teachers who would not wait for academic promotion to Paris.

An almost obsessive ambition to reach the academic centre, and the difficulties of doing so, are best seen in the career of Albert Mathiez. At the same time, the career of Mathiez shows what a man of extraordinary vitality,

³⁷ Durkheim, Émile, *et al.*, *La Vie universitaire à Paris* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1918), p. 28.

³⁸ Canivez, A., *op. cit.*, vol. II.

³⁹ Bruneau, W., *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁴⁰ Gerbod, P., *op. cit.*, p. 20.

and even originality, could accomplish in a variety of provincial posts. Mathiez, whose aim in his work on the French Revolution was to enthrone Robespierre and dethrone Danton, had along with Alphonse Aulard, Danton's supporter, always aimed at Paris. Born in Franche-Comté in 1874, of poor parents, he eventually entered the *École normale*. Then he spent a quarter of his life trying to get out of secondary teaching and into the university. While working on his *doctorat* at the turn of the century, he taught at *lycées* in Montauban, Rochefort, Châteauroux and Caen—all of them charming but intellectually provincial towns. Eventually he was appointed to the Lycée Voltaire in the capital. Simultaneously he accepted temporary appointments at faculties in Nancy, then Caen and Lille, which meant regular journeys by rail. Not until his late thirties was he appointed to a regular university post; but although it was in his native *pays*—which, like Lagneau, Clemenceau, and so many others, he esteemed as much as he did the larger *pays*—the university at Besançon was the smallest in the country and not highly regarded.

He carried on his research all the while. He became known; his battle with Aulard added to his reputation. Paris remained the prize he sought. Jacques Godechot, one of his distinguished students, asserted that “at that time no one in France dreamed that a professor from a provincial university could pretend in the least to be the rival of a Parisian: the Sorbonne appeared as the supreme and indispensable consecration.”⁴¹

Aulard, meanwhile, occupied the chair in the French Revolution at the Sorbonne. He held it for an extraordinarily long time—from the 1880s until 1922. Mathiez kept waiting. In 1919 he left Besançon for a larger faculty at Dijon. He used local sources relatively little, however, and kept travelling to Paris to work in the national archives. In 1920 he wrote to Aulard asking for a post at the Sorbonne; he was flatly, if politely, refused.

In 1922 Aulard announced his retirement. Mathiez took the train from Dijon to Paris and went around to professors at the Sorbonne soliciting their votes. But Aulard carried the day and Philippe Sagnac, a less original, although a solid historian, was selected as his successor. (Sagnac himself had taught at the faculty of Lille since 1898—almost a quarter of a century. Waiting for promotion to Paris could take the best years of one's life.)

Mathiez had, to be sure, enriched cultural life in the provinces. He had helped found a journal for Burgundy and was editor of the *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* while there. He did not stagnate; but he was not entirely satisfied. He wanted to compose a general history of the French Revolution in several volumes and for this he needed the main archives which were in Paris; but he also felt bitter about “this superior air which is so well established in professors at the Sorbonne”.⁴²

Finally in 1925 at the age of 51 he substituted for Sagnac while the latter

⁴¹ Quoted in Friguglietti, James, *Albert Mathiez: Historien révolutionnaire (1874–1932)* (Paris: Société des études Robespierriistes, 1974), p. vii. Godechot recently left Paris to become a dean at Toulouse.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 176.

was on leave to teach at the University of Cairo. The leave grew into some four years and Mathiez eventually became a *chargé de cours* at the Sorbonne. But he never relinquished his chair at Dijon, which was assigned to a visiting lecturer. For a time he kept residences in both Dijon and Paris. Toward the end of his life he conducted a series of seminars at the *École pratique des hautes études*—all on economic subjects like paper money or property during the Revolution. He died of a heart attack in 1932; he had had little time to savour his Parisian triumph.

Mathiez' successor, Georges Lefebvre, passed through roughly the same course. Lefebvre was, like Mathiez, born in 1874, but unlike him remained wholly in the provinces throughout the first part of his life, doing his undergraduate work at the University of Lille. Always proud of his French, Flemish and Lillois origins he was less ambitious to enter the Parisian scene than Mathiez. This affected his work; Lefebvre was the first historian of his generation to use local archives in a systematic way. While he worked on these sources, he taught at a number of *lycées* in the north of France—for about 25 years. Lefebvre was, as Professor R. R. Palmer has observed, "an obscure provincial without contacts with intellectual circles in Paris until he was fifty".⁴³ Then in 1924 he defended his 1,000-page doctoral thesis on the peasants of the Nord during the French Revolution. His distinguished examiners Aulard, Sagnac, and Charles Seignobos were speechless in the face of the dissertation. The thesis, with a mark of *très honorable*, was of course accepted and it brought him into university teaching, briefly at Clermont-Ferrand, and then at Strasbourg, thanks to the influence of Marc Bloch, who was impressed by Lefebvre's attention to economic and social history. Lefebvre had to have his dissertation published with his own funds, and in a very small edition; copies were very rare until an Italian publisher reprinted it in the late 1950s.⁴⁴

In 1937, on Sagnac's retirement, Lefebvre was "elevated to the metropolitan see of French Revolution studies",⁴⁵ the chair at the Sorbonne, which he occupied until retirement in 1945. From the mid-1930s he was best known for his general studies; his most original work had largely been done before 1932, and in the provinces, not Paris. He remained in Paris until his death in 1960; but whether his heart was entirely in Paris may be questioned since, at his death, most of his books were left not to the Sorbonne, as was customary, but to the public library of Lille.⁴⁶

The career of Marc Bloch also exhibits the same pattern; the movement from provinces to Paris, and the consummation of a career there. Bloch came from a distinguished Lyonnais-Alsatian Jewish family—his father was

⁴³ Palmer, R. R., "Georges Lefebvre: The Peasants and the French Revolution", *Journal of Modern History*, XXXI (December 1959), p. 331.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁴⁶ See also, Cobb, R. C., "Georges Lefebvre", *Past and Present*, XVIII (November, 1960), pp. 52–60. Beatrice Hyslop also devoted an article to Lefebvre in *French Historical Studies*, I (Spring, 1960), pp. 265–82.

himself a scholar. He went the well-trodden route from the Lycée Louis-le-Grand in Paris to the École normale. Like Lefebvre he was greatly influenced by geographical studies as well as sociology—both were reflected in his doctoral work for the Sorbonne on the eradication of serfdom in the Île-de-France.

Bloch began his teaching career just before the First World War at the *lycées* of Montpellier and Amiens. After military service, which included participation at the battle of the Somme, he became, in 1919, *maître de conférences* at Strasbourg. His period at Strasbourg was a fruitful one, and he was finally called to the Sorbonne in the era of the Popular Front. He had longed ardently for his transfer. He was co-editor of *Les Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. Now he became a world figure in scholarship.⁴⁷

In practically all cases, a distinguished doctoral dissertation and scholarly achievement in the provinces were prerequisites to promotion to Paris. The medievalist Robert Boutrouche, who was born in 1904, began teaching at the *lycée* of Bordeaux in 1929 while working on his dissertation on the Bordelais during the Hundred Years War. Boutrouche eventually took a post as lecturer at Strasbourg in 1937 and finally entered the École pratique des hautes études, Paris, in 1951, ending up at the Sorbonne itself in 1958 at the age of 54.⁴⁸ About a quarter of a century earlier, Augustin Renaudet, who was born in Paris in 1880, wrote a superb doctoral thesis, *Préréforme et humanisme en France—1500–1525*, completed in 1916; it made his reputation. Having taught in a *lycée* in Rennes and then in Angoulême, he had done intensive research in Italy, partly at his own expense. He became a professor with emphasis on Italian history at the University of Bordeaux in 1919, and in 1937 was called to Paris. He was then in his late fifties. Renaudet's publication list, already considerable, became larger; he became one of the greatest Erasmian scholars.⁴⁹

Charles Guignebert also rose in the academic world in part on the basis of a dissertation which was original and which helped launch a new direction in historiography. Guignebert, born in a village in 1867, where he grew up speaking a local patois, attended the Sorbonne where he was known for his industriousness. Teaching successively at the *lycées* of Évreux, Pau and Toulouse in the 1890s, he brought out in 1902 his doctoral dissertation on Tertullian and his times. This established Guignebert as a prominent specialist in the history of Christianity, and after assuming the post of *chargé de cours* at the Sorbonne in 1906, he eventually was elected to the new chair in the history of Christianity in 1919. At the Sorbonne, he influenced a whole generation of students, wrote a number of general works, such as *Le Monde juif vers le temps de Jésus*, directed a series of text books for use in

⁴⁷ On Bloch's career see Febvre, Lucien, "Marc Bloch et Strasbourg", in his *Combats pour l'histoire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1953), and Fink, Carole, Introduction to Bloch, Marc, *Memoirs of War: 1914–15* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980).

⁴⁸ On Boutrouche, see "Nécrologie", in *Revue historique* CCLV (January–June 1976), pp. 515–516.

⁴⁹ On Renaudet's career up to his appointment at the Sorbonne see *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XIII (July–August, 1939), p. 382.

secondary schools, and also had time to participate in political movements of a pacifist nature and to create a musical society at the university.⁵⁰

Many scholars who later taught in the faculty of letters at the Sorbonne went by the route of the great Paris *lycées* and then the *École normale supérieure*. At these institutions abilities could be early identified and nurtured. Paul Hazard was the son of a village schoolmaster in Flanders; he went first to the *lycée* of Lille; his transfer to the *lycée* Lakanal in Paris was the beginning of “a regular progression of scholarly successes, brilliant studies and the awakening of a vocation”.⁵¹ Hazard entered the *École normale supérieure*, and “his success appeared natural”.⁵² He then taught at several *lycées*, completed an important doctoral dissertation at Lyon in 1910, and became a professor at the Sorbonne in 1919 and the author of numerous important works on European intellectual history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

To have attended the *École normale supérieure* was more important for ascent to the Sorbonne than attendance at one of the great *lycées* of Paris. So it was in the case of Pierre Renouvin, the diplomatic historian, whose rapid ascent to the Sorbonne made him a rarity in the French university world. The youngest *agrégé* in France in 1912 at age 19, he became at 30 a *chargé de cours* at the Sorbonne and at 38 was appointed to a *maîtrise de conférences* (1931).⁵³ Renouvin later became the editor of the *Revue historique* and the main French diplomatic historian of his time.

Edmond Perrin was another historian born in the provinces who attended the *École normale supérieure*, went back to teach in provincial *lycées*, then taught medieval history at the Universities of Grenoble, Strasbourg, and finally Paris. Like so many others, he arrived in his fifties.⁵⁴

Émile Durkheim, another *Normalien*, taught at several provincial *lycées*, then at Bordeaux, where he occupied the first chair in sociology, coupled with education. He moved to Paris in 1902, as a *chargé de cours* replacing Ferdinand Buisson in education, the latter having become a deputy in the Chamber. He was appointed to the chair of sociology in 1906, having already published very important sociological works and established the *Année sociologique*. He had important links with figures such as Liard and Lavissee and his influence helped lead to the successive appointments of his disciples Fauconnet, Halbwachs, and Georges Davy in his chair.⁵⁵

Maurice Halbwachs had a longer journey back to Paris. Born in Reims in 1877, he had attended first a provincial *lycée* and then one of the *grandes*

⁵⁰ On Guignebert, see M. B., “Charles Guignebert (1867–1939): sa vie et son oeuvre”. *Annales de l'Université de Paris* XIV (July–October, 1939), pp. 365–380.

⁵¹ Carré, J. M., “Paul Hazard”, *Revue de littérature comparée*, XX (1940), pp. 5–12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵³ On Pierre Renouvin see “Nécrologie”, *Revue historique*, CCLV (January–June 1976), pp. 325–329.

⁵⁴ Biographical notice in *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XIII (July–August 1938), p. 378.

⁵⁵ See Clark, T. N., *op. cit.*, *passim*; Karady, V., “Durkheim, les sciences sociales et l'Université: Bilan d'un semi-échec”, *Revue française de sociologie*, XVII (April–June 1976), p. 268; Weisz, G., “L'ideologie republicain et les sciences sociales: Les Durkheimiens et la chaire d'histoire d'économie sociale à la Sorbonne”, *Revue française de sociologie*, XX (January–March 1979), pp. 82–112, and La Capra, Dominick, *Émile Durkheim: Sociologist and Philosopher* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972), ch. 2.

lycées of Paris, Henri-IV. "He was a *lycéen sans histoire* until the day at Henri-IV when he became the student of Bergson. Dazzled by the man, he discovered a vocation."⁵⁶ In Paris he was also influenced by the socialist group around the *École normale supérieure*—Charles Péguy, Jean Jaurès and Lucien Herr. Durkheim was also a major influence. After teaching philosophy at a variety of *lycées*, Halbwachs became a professor of sociology at Strasbourg in 1918, and was called to Paris in the mid-1930s. (He was killed in Buchenwald in March 1945.)

Davy's career also reveals a long provincial apprenticeship at various levels. Having taught at the *lycées* of Nice and Lyon, he was a professor at the faculty of letters of Dijon from 1922 to 1931, then rector of the *Académie de Rennes*, 1931–1938, and eventually he became incumbent of the chair of sociology at the Sorbonne in 1944. He was by that time in his early sixties.⁵⁷

The careers of Marcel Mauss and Celestin Bouglé are typical of many others. Marcel Mauss was born in 1872 at Épinal, Vosges. A nephew of Durkheim, he was rapidly promoted to the Sorbonne in 1900, when the professor of comparative history of religions was killed in an accident.⁵⁸

Célestin Bouglé was another beneficiary of Durkheim's teaching and patronage. Born in Brittany, a graduate of the *École normale supérieure*, he did his *stage* in the provinces (Montpellier and Toulouse), before his thesis, *Les Idées égalitaires*, and other books, his work with the Durkheimian team around the *Année sociologique*, his teaching ability, and his ability to gain support for himself enabled him to make his way to Paris. At the Sorbonne he created the Centre de documentation sociale in 1927 and was later appointed director of the *École normale supérieure*. There he had much to do with the career of students such as Lévi-Strauss.⁵⁹

The situation was little different in the relatively new discipline of psychology. The Sorbonne drew to itself its pioneers Paul and Pierre Janet. Charles Blondel, born in Lyon, a graduate of the *École normale supérieure* and a Durkheimian, taught at a variety of *lycées* and then at the University of Strasbourg, before taking a post at the Sorbonne in 1937. Paul Guillaume, born in 1878, taught at a number of provincial *lycées*, then in 1923 began teaching in *lycées* in Paris; in 1938 he became a professor of pedagogical psychology at the University of Paris. He became influential in that field.⁶⁰

The career of Albert Demangeon, born in 1872 and dying in 1940, who was an historical geographer, was much like that of Durkheim and his

⁵⁶ Alexandre, Jeanne, "Maurice Halbwachs", *L'Année sociologique*, Series III, I (1945), pp. 3–10; see also biographical notice in *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XIII (July–August 1938), pp. 376–381.

⁵⁷ Girard, Alain, "Georges Davy: L'Homme et la sociologie", *L'Année sociologique*, Series III, XXVII (1976), pp. 5–15.

⁵⁸ Lévy-Bruhl, H., "Marcel Mauss", *L'Année sociologique*, Series III, II (1951), p. x.

⁵⁹ Speech by M. Roussy on Bouglé in *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XV (April–June 1940), p. 21. See also "Bouglé: In memoriam" in *L'Année sociologique*, Series III, I (1940), p. xii; Clark, T. N., *op. cit.*, and Vogt, W. Paul, "Un Durkheimien ambivalent: Célestin Bouglé, 1870–1940", *Revue française de sociologie*, XX (January–March 1979), pp. 123–139.

⁶⁰ Courbon, Paul, "Charles Blondel (1876–1939)", *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XIV (May–June, 1939), pp. 316–317; biographical notice in *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XIII (October–December 1938), p. 375.

protégés. Born at a village of the Eure, Demangeon passed through the École normale supérieure, then taught at a series of *lycées* in the north of France. It was his thesis, in 1905, on Picardy and neighbouring areas “that revealed him”: his pioneering regional monograph served as a model for a generation. He became a professor at the University of Lille and having completed further regional investigations was appointed *maître de conférences* at the Sorbonne in 1912. In 1925 he acceded to a chair in geography. The latter part of his career saw him engaged in more general work, dealing with current questions, as was the case with Bouglé. Demangeon wrote on the Ruhr and the issue of reparations, the British Empire and its problems, and *Le Déclin de l'Europe*. He also edited a series of text books for secondary and primary schools, and edited the *Annales de géographie*, as well as supervising many doctoral dissertations.⁶¹

This pattern was characteristic of other geographers as well. For example, Georges Chabot's career was successful partly because of his innovative work in the field of regional geography. A graduate of the École normale supérieure, Chabot went from teaching in a *lycée* to the University of Strasbourg, and finally to the Sorbonne, as professor of regional geography in 1948, at the age of 58. His works on regions like Burgundy are still considered to be classics in the field. Another professor of geography, Roger Dion, born in 1896, also attended the École normale and taught at the University of Lille for a number of years, before taking a chair in economic and political geography at the Sorbonne in 1945. He was elevated to a professorship at the Collège de France in 1948. Charles-Édouard Robequain, born in 1897 in the Drôme, taught geography at several *lycées*, including, in 1926, the *lycée* of Hanoi, received his doctorate in 1929, held appointments at the Universities of Poitiers and Rennes, and in 1937 became a *maître de conférences* in the field of colonial geography at the Sorbonne, specialising in Indochina.⁶²

Another career of exactly the same duration and very similar pattern was that of René Huchon (1872–1940). Born in Paris of Norman parents, he grew up in Normandy and there became interested in English literature. After a series of *lycée* posts, his two theses of 1906 on George Crabbe and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu made his name, and he was promoted to the Sorbonne in 1908, where he eventually took the first chair in English philology. During the great exodus of 1940 he committed suicide: “To have left Paris, the Sorbonne, the Institute of English, which was under his direction, seemed to him the negation of his whole life.”⁶³

In classics, it was little different. Georges-Constant Mathieu, born in 1890

⁶¹ Marres, Paul, “Albert Demangeon (1872–1940)”, *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XV (July–December 1979), pp. 123–139.

⁶² Biographical notice, *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XVIII (October–December 1948), pp. 404–405; *Dictionnaire biographique, op. cit.*, p. 229; and *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XIII (October–December 1938), p. 381.

⁶³ Delattre, Floris, “René Huchon (1872–1940)”, *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XV (July–December 1940), pp. 291–302.

and a student at the École normale, taught at four provincial *lycées*, then at the Universities of Grenoble and Nancy. He became professor of Greek literature at the Sorbonne in 1938. Robert Flacelière, an historian of daily life in Periclean Athens, was born in 1904 in Paris, attended the École normale supérieure, taught at one *lycée*, then from 1933 to 1948 at the University of Lyon; his doctorate was completed in 1937. In 1948 he became *maître de conférences* on Greek eloquence at the Sorbonne. Louis Gernet, born in 1882, was another classicist whose originality was recognised by a professorship at the Sorbonne: "For 31 years he had worked in the provinces . . . isolated, sparking hardly comprehension of, let alone interest in, his methods and his approach to the study of ancient Greeks." After a steady stream of books, articles and commentaries, "Gernet arrived at last in Paris, choosing a post at the École pratique des hautes études (6th Section) in preference to a chair at the Sorbonne. He was 66 years old. In the years during which he taught until his death at 80, Gernet gathered a small but devoted group of disciples and persuaded them that his way of doing things could provide a breakthrough in classical studies. . . ." ⁶⁴

The attractive power of the Sorbonne was also manifested in philology and in the comparative study of languages and literatures. Jean Boutière, born in 1898, taught at several provincial *lycées* before finishing his doctorate in 1930. He then became a *maître de conférences* in philology at Dijon and in 1938 was made professor of oriental languages and director of an institute for Romanian studies there. In 1947 he became *maître de conférences* of Romanian philology at the Sorbonne. His range of publications was wide—including works on Romanian, Provençal, Old French and "dialectology", among others. Ferdinand Baldensperger, born in Saint-Dié (Vosges) in 1871, taught at the Universities of Nancy and Lyon, before being called to the Sorbonne in 1910, where he was a major figure in studies in the field of comparative literature. ⁶⁵

In the natural sciences, promotion to the Sorbonne or the Collège de France or the École pratique des hautes études was joined by the possibility of appointment to high positions in research institutes or in offices dealing with science policy. The latter course was represented in the career of Jacques Cavalier (1869–1937) who began teaching as *maître de conférences* at the Rennes faculty of science, then became *chargé de cours* at Marseille, before being appointed in succession to the rectorship of the academies of Poitiers (1909–1914), Toulouse (1914–1922) and Lyon (1922–1926). Eventually he was appointed head of the Caisse nationale de la recherche scientifique in Paris. He died in 1937. Louis Mangin, a botanist, moved from Lorraine where he taught at the *lycée* of Nancy to Louis-le-Grand in Paris and eventually became director of the Museum in Paris. Gaston Dupouy,

⁶⁴ Biographical notices in *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XIII (October–December 1938), p. 337; *ibid.*, XVII (October–December 1948), p. 408; and Visser, Margaret, "The Cult of Louis Gernet", *Classical Views*, XXVI (New series I, 3) (1982), pp. 369–375.

⁶⁵ Biographical notice, *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, XVIII (January–March 1948), pp. 98–101; and *Dictionnaire biographique*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

having taught between the wars at the faculty of sciences of the Universities of Rennes and then Toulouse, became in 1950 director of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique, at the age of 50, in Paris.⁶⁶

In the main, the careers of natural scientists followed the same pattern as those of academic social scientists and humanists. The combination of achievements, eminence and translation to the centre was the rule for scientists as well as for the others. Lucien Poincaré, the physicist, taught at a variety of provincial *lycées*, and eventually at the Sorbonne.⁶⁷ Gabriel Lippmann, another important physicist, contributed to the prestige of the Sorbonne by his achievements and their recognition in the award of the Nobel prize.⁶⁸

French Nobel prize-winners in physics from 1901 to 1950 either taught at the Sorbonne or worked at nearby Parisian institutions of research. In chemistry from 1901 to 1950, only Paul Sabatier of Toulouse and Victor Grignard of Nancy, co-winners of the prize, fell outside this pattern. In physiology or medicine all Nobel-laureates held at least one Parisian post.⁶⁹

The provincial phase could sometimes be avoided by natural scientists particularly in new fields such as radioactivity or atomic research, and especially in medicine, where most professors rose quickly within Paris hospitals or other institutions in the capital. Of ten "professeurs à la faculté de Médecin de Paris" in 1954, all had risen directly to professorial rank without teaching or internship in the provinces. This was in part because opportunities were fewer in the provinces, so that a tradition of Parisian self-sufficiency in medical teaching developed when there were very few faculties of medicine in the provinces. The persistence of this tradition was of course reinforced by the prestige of Paris and of the Sorbonne. Only Lyon and Bordeaux had officially recognised faculties in the early 1870s; then Lille followed in 1875 and Toulouse in 1890. It remained a "rigidly hierarchical profession" favouring Paris even after opportunities for medical teaching in the provinces increased markedly.⁷⁰

The dominant pattern of a professor of the Sorbonne includes birth outside Paris, a sojourn in Paris for training, a teaching *stage* in the provinces, and then the appointment to the Sorbonne later in life. Seventy-two per cent. of 50 eminent professors at the Sorbonne in 1954 fell into this category. A secondary pattern of birth in Paris and academic service in the provinces before ascending to the Sorbonne were characteristic of 20 per cent. Only 8 per cent. were born in Paris and made their entire academic career there up to the point of professorship at the Sorbonne.

⁶⁶ "Nécrologie", *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, XC (1937), p. 115; and *Dictionnaire biographique*, p. 244.

⁶⁷ "Nécrologie", *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, LXXIV (1920), pp. 83–85.

⁶⁸ "Nécrologie", *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, LXXV (1921), pp. 339–341.

⁶⁹ Heathcote, Niels H. de V., *Nobel Prize Winners in Physics 1901–1950* (New York: Henry Schuman, 1953); Farber, Eduard, *Nobel Prize Winners in Chemistry: 1901–1961* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1963) and Odelberg, L. (ed.), *Nobel: The Man and his Prizes*, 3rd edn. (New York: Elsevier, 1972).

⁷⁰ *Dictionnaire biographique*, *op. cit.*, The sample of professors of medicine is constituted from entries under letters A and D; see also Weisz, George, "Reform and Conflict in French Medical Education, 1870–1914", in Fox, R., and Weisz, G. *op. cit.*, p. 66.

TABLE

Careers of 50 Eminent Professors of the Sorbonne, 1954

Dominant Pattern	Secondary Pattern	Tertiary Pattern	Average Age of First Appointment at the Sorbonne
72%	20%	8%	46.3%

SOURCE: *Dictionnaire biographique français contemporain*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Pharos, 1954).

Of these 50 eminent professors, 21 attended the *École normale supérieure*. In the humanistic disciplines an overwhelming majority had done so. Despite attempts to diminish the importance of the *École normale supérieure* for a university career, what was said of an earlier period was true until well after the end of the Third Republic: “. . . the *École Normale* reveals itself to be the stratifying criterion of the University, commanding, in a certain sense, all the others”. In fact, *normaliens* showed increasing preference for careers in higher education between 1900 and 1940. In the *promotions* of 1900–1909, 29 per cent. of graduates in *lettres* and 20 per cent. in natural sciences went into university teaching; for the classes of 1930–1941, the percentages had risen to 42 and 47 per cent. respectively.⁷¹

Efforts to Resist the Ascendancy of the Sorbonne

The theme of the provinces as the desert of exile is a common one in French history and literature. The very notion of *aller en province* has had no parallel in English usage. Yet, those whose destiny it was to remain in the provinces did not always accept their inferiority of status nor were they always paralysed intellectually by it.

From their inception, provincial universities and their supporters made efforts to combat the supremacy of Paris. Speeches at the ceremonial inaugurations of provincial universities after the enactment of the law of 1896 stressed this theme, along with that of local service through education. At the ceremony at Lyon, one speaker declared that “we love our university domes with the same profound love that the peasants love the church spire of their village”.⁷² The theme of competition with Paris was emphasized during the ceremony at Caen. Administrators there feared that budgets were not high enough to keep Norman students from going to the capital; more important was the need to “hold onto the young professors, by forcing them not to look toward Paris, or even toward Bordeaux, Lyon, or Lille, which in the minds of young professors are beginning to replace [the image] that Paris [alone] used to have”.⁷³

Certain provincial universities began to develop specialities that rivalled

⁷¹ Karady, V., “L’Expansion universitaire . . .”, p. 454; percentages in Smith, R. J., *op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁷² “Inauguration des universités”, *Revue internationale de l’enseignement*, XXXIII (1897), p. 60.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

Paris.⁷⁴ In sociology the Universities of Toulouse and Bordeaux achieved some fame. Poitiers became a centre for Hispanic studies. In Poitiers, Jean Sarrailh single-handedly launched an institute for Spanish studies in 1925 and in 1934 was given a chair in the subject. Jean-Robert Debray noted the advantage of this centre: "It is far from Paris, but permits better withdrawal for research. Can one find an Hispanic centre in the capital of Poitou?"⁷⁵ To his rhetorical question, Debray responds affirmatively. After 1897 Grenoble became a leading university for the teaching of French to foreigners. The use of laboratory facilities and instruction in phonetics were advanced there. The University of Grenoble, following the *Ferienkurse* of the Universities of Jena and Marburg, introduced the *cours de vacance*.⁷⁶

Certain provincial universities organised *sociétés des amis de l'université* which donated funds for the establishment of new subjects and chairs, and for the purchase of equipment. The sums donated were not large, but these *sociétés* linked universities with laymen and, more important, with the business community. In Toulouse the chamber of commerce led in the foundation of a *société d'amis*. In Marseille the chairman of the *société* was a former president of the Tribunal de commerce. From 1889 to 1893 the *société* at Lyon donated 25,000 francs to the university, on the condition that the government would match this sum. Local initiative in the provision of private funds was far more important in the budgets of the provincial universities than it was in that of the Sorbonne.⁷⁷

Provincial towns also had local institutions that scholars sometimes overlook: especially important were the *académies* and other amateur scientific or literary societies, usually publishing their own journals. These should not be underestimated as fora for discussion and presentation of ideas.

Dr. Robert Fox has noted that the *sociétés savantes* made great strides in the life-sciences and in archaeology, geology, and geography before 1870, only to be driven into obscurity by the growth of academic faculties. Their effect varied; in Toulouse the *académie* of Toulouse and the faculty of sciences helped each other significantly. Industrial societies were particularly important in the East. In Bordeaux, the Société philomathique became something of a faculty in itself. Not of the highest order intellectually, it was still important and wealthy. Yet in the period 1870–1914, "Most of the contacts between town and gown seem to have been made at a social rather than an academic level."⁷⁸ The professionalisation of science and of culture made the local amateur scientist or savant even more provincial. On the

⁷⁴ Karady, V., "Durkheim, les sciences sociales et l'Université", p. 268.

⁷⁵ Debray, J. R., "Notice sur la vie et les travaux de Jean Sarrailh", *Annales de l'Université des Paris*, XXXVIII, special number (November–December 1968), p. 87. On Toulouse, see notice on Ernest Méricime in *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, LXXVII (1924), p. 182.

⁷⁶ Sée, I. R., "L'Enseignement du français aux étrangers en quelques universités de province", *Revue pédagogique*, LIV (July–December 1909), pp. 561–566.

⁷⁷ Weisz, G., "The French Universities and Education for the New Professions . . .", pp. 105–106.

⁷⁸ Fox, R., "The Savant Confronts his Peers: Scientific Societies in France, 1815–1914", in Fox, R. and Weisz, G. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 254.

whole, professors after 1879 looked more to the “official, Parisian culture” than to these provincial and amateur sources of enrichment.⁷⁹

In the natural sciences, there was a great improvement everywhere in facilities and in the quality of research between about 1875 and 1900, and especially among the reformed faculties in the provinces. Faculties of natural science, trying to live up to the models seen in the German universities, had now become respectable competitors to the *grandes écoles*. Decrees of 1885 and 1896 allowing local government and industry to finance provincial faculties of science—and they did provide most of the support for research—helped to weaken to some degree the suffocating effect of policies and traditions which gave pre-eminence to Paris. Professors in the provincial science faculties now had to do research continuously and intensively, in contrast with the earlier situation in which they had been discouraged from doing so.

Nevertheless from 1900 onward, and especially from 1909 until after the First World War, there was a falling-off in provincial vigour and in the rate of provincial publications in scientific subjects. This was mainly due to a diminution of financial resources and to the victory of industrialists, who in return for their financial support insisted on determining course-content, and increasingly demanded research directed towards immediate practical application and graduates oriented towards careers in industry.

The Sorbonne was itself expanding all the while and most of the important doctoral dissertations in science were still produced there. (In 1901, the faculty of science in Paris granted 29 of the 49 doctorates awarded in France; the University of Lyon, its closest competitor, granted five.) The regional environment, somewhat free of the Parisian centre, did however permit some important scientific research.⁸⁰ In this, the support of science faculties by local industry was of great importance. In fact, “the (industrial) institutes created genuine faculties of science in the provinces”.⁸¹ These institutes, attached to faculties of science in the late nineteenth century, took a major role in making the university “a vehicle for introducing scientific and technological knowledge into economic life . . . before the First World War”.⁸²

Research institutes were strongest in industrial towns like Lille and Nancy, where the majority of graduates entered local industries, especially after 1900. There was a special emphasis everywhere on applied chemistry

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 241–282 and Fox, R., “Learning, Politics and Polite Culture in Provincial France: The Sociétés Savantes in the Nineteenth Century”, in Baker, D., and Harrigan, P. (eds.), *The Making of Frenchmen: Current Directions in the History of Education in France, 1679–1979, Historical Reflections*, special issue (1980), pp. 543–564.

⁸⁰ Shinn, Terry “The French Science Faculty System, 1808–1914: Institutional Change and Research Potential in Mathematics and the Physical Sciences”, in *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, X (1979), pp. 271–332. See also Ben-David, Joseph, “The Rise and Decline of France as a Scientific Centre”, *Minerva*, VIII (April 1970), pp. 160–179 and Paul, Harry, “The Issue of Decline in Nineteenth-Century French Science”, *French Historical Studies*, VII (Fall 1972), pp. 416–450.

⁸¹ Paul, Harry, “Apollo Courts the Vulcans: The Applied Science Institutes in Nineteenth-Century Science Faculties”, in Fox, R. and Weisz, G. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 155.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

and on electricity. But under the pressure of these trends the study of theoretical chemistry also improved in faculties of science and so did subjects like botany, partly because of agricultural interests (including wine-making and brewing). Some representative institutions were a school of industrial chemistry at Bordeaux, an *École de brasserie* at Nancy, the Institut aérodynamique, also at Nancy, and the Institut électrotechnique at Toulouse, among many others. There were also a few chairs in industrial physics and agricultural chemistry. The institutes, and the faculties to which they were attached, fulfilled a special role for industry which the *grandes écoles* could not do. French provincial science was more concerned with practical results than was the case of scientific research in Paris.⁸³

Of all provincial universities, Toulouse especially had the richest “scientific renaissance” under the Third Republic. Between 1880 and 1930 the university developed a very animated scientific atmosphere; in 1912, Paul Sabatier of the University of Toulouse was awarded the Nobel prize for chemistry, along with Victor Grignard of the University of Nancy. Toulouse, as a distinctive radical republican city, was most receptive to scientific advancement. The *Dépêche de Toulouse* was one of the few provincial dailies that could rival those of Paris, and at that time dealt at length with educational problems. The university brought and kept able administrators; scientists of Sabatier’s quality would not have stayed had the university and the town had little to offer. Toulouse was also well-served by Jean Jaurès, who could persuade both the municipality and the Assemblée nationale to support the university; he attended the opening of new science buildings in 1891. Enrolment, professorships and salaries increased.

By 1910–11 the total enrolment in science at Toulouse was six times what it had been in 1895. It was obviously attracting students who might otherwise have gone to Paris, and increasing its number of foreign students.

But by 1930, partly as a result of the war and inflation, Toulouse lost some of its *élan*, and Paris, retaining its advantage, “continued to attract the most eminent scientists and to remain the centre.”⁸⁴

Paris continued to be the “centre of power” in physics, and “no such centre of power existed in other countries.”⁸⁵ Provincial complaints about the lack of assistants were frequent; this was partly because “a few influential Paris professors controlled appointments so closely that provincial professors had no say in choosing their own assistants.”⁸⁶ Movements between one chair and another usually went from the provinces to Paris. Private gifts in physics were most lavish for Paris, supporting laboratories like the Curies’ or Lippmann’s. And in the budget for scientific equipment and maintenance, the University of Toulouse had less than 10 per cent. of

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 155–182.

⁸⁴ Nye, M. J., “The Scientific Periphery in France . . .”, p. 403.

⁸⁵ See Forman, Paul, Heilbron, J. L., and Weart, Spencer (eds.), “Physics circa 1900: Personnel, Funding and Productivity of the Academic Establishments”, in *Historical Studies in the Physical Sciences*, V (1975), pp. 32–33, 56, 60–61, and 81.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

the provision for the University of Paris. Nancy was the only other possible competitor in the field of physics.⁸⁷

Outside the natural sciences, the University of Strasbourg between 1919 and 1940, especially succeeded in avoiding the doldrums of provinciality. The return of Alsace to French sovereignty was accompanied by the intention that the University of Strasbourg should be a great academic centre in Europe. It was the age of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre in social history, and the launching of one of the most important historical journals of this century, the *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*. Halbwachs in sociology and a strong scientific contingent, along with literary and Biblical studies, rounded out the university's reputation. In 1920, a centre of medieval studies was created under Marc Bloch's leadership. At that point Gustave Cohen and Étienne Gilson also taught at Strasbourg, before going to Paris. And, as at other provincial universities, technical institutes helped provide fruitful applications of scientific theories. Here one could mention the École nationale de pétrole attached to the university. One should also note that a higher percentage of foreign students attended Strasbourg than any other provincial university and they probably enlivened intellectual life there; in 1928, one quarter of the student body was foreign. As had happened in the case of the University of Toulouse, the period after 1930 saw a certain slackening of the intellectual vitality of the university. This was partly due to the departure of Bloch, Halbwachs, Cohen and Gilson for the capital.⁸⁸

There are few examples of professors who preferred to remain in the provinces rather than to become professors at the Sorbonne. Sabatier was the best known of these. "Despite offers of scientific chairs at Paris, Sabatier elected to remain throughout his career at the provincial University of Toulouse. This was a most uncharacteristic choice in a period when scientists and intellectuals rarely turned a deaf ear to the mother city's call." He said, "light should not only come from Paris, but also from the provinces."⁸⁹ He broke with a number of traditions. In 1913 he became the first professor not living in Paris to be elected to the Académie des sciences.

Victor Grignard, co-winner of the Nobel prize in 1912, remained at Nancy but this might have been because his output of publications was not large; his *Traité de chimie organique* in 20 volumes was not published until after his death. In contrast with Sabatier and Grignard, Albin Haller left Nancy in 1899 for a chair in organic chemistry in Paris even though the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

⁸⁸ On Strasbourg see Febvre, Lucien, *op. cit.*; and *Times Educational Supplement*, no. 696 (1 September, 1928). On the creation of the centre of medieval studies, see *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, LXXIV (1920), pp. 282–283. On sociology, see Craig, John E., "Maurice Halbwachs' Strasbourg," *Revue française de sociologie*, XX (January–March 1979), pp. 273–292, and Stoianovich, Traian, *French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976).

⁸⁹ Nye, M. J., "Nonconformity and Creativity: A Study of Paul Sabatier, Chemical Theory, and the French Scientific Community", *Isis*, LXVIII (March 1977), pp. 375–391.

material situation was less attractive in the capital. Most of the more distinguished of Sabatier's colleagues accepted invitations from Paris.⁹⁰

Only after the Second World War was it practical for professors of high quality to ignore the call to Paris and to remain in the provinces. This was perhaps at least in part because of the deterioration of the quality of life in the capital, especially after 1960. Louis Néel, who shared the Nobel prize for physics in 1970, had been since the Second World War, the director of an important institute for nuclear research connected with the University of Grenoble. (One of his preferred activities of leisure was hiking in the mountains outside the city.) He found it desirable to remain in Grenoble.⁹¹ Jacques Godechot, an historian at the Sorbonne, left that university for a deanship at Toulouse. Robert Escarpit, a professor of the sociology of literature of the University of Bordeaux, has also spurned the call of Paris.

Another factor which has helped to keep professors in the provinces has been better transportation, allowing provincial professors to teach in the provincial institution and to maintain a residence in Paris. According to the authors of a history of Besançon, "this phenomenon of non-residence (after the Second World War), common to the majority of universities north of the Loire, was reinforced at Besançon by the long-time mediocrity of its laboratories and specialised libraries." (The university library there in the early 1960s contained only 250,000 volumes.) Joseph Presch, rector at Strasbourg after the Second World War, lived in Paris. And in the 1970s, Gabriel Désert, an historical demographer at Caen, had an apartment in the capital. Paul Gerbod, an historian, also taught in the provinces and maintained a residence in Paris.⁹² This phenomenon of residence in Paris and the retention of a post in a provincial university does not bear witness to pride in one's own university and attachment to it. It might rather be a result of an absence of opportunity to move to the Sorbonne. It is not evidence of a determined resistance against the superior attractive power of the Sorbonne.

The renaissance of Toulouse and to a lesser extent those of the provincial universities, despite some problems, were genuine. The research institutes attached to provincial universities were reasonably effective. The gains originating in the law of 1896 granted a measure of independence: provincial universities had their own budgets, deans of faculties were elected by colleagues, the universities could create chairs, receive gifts, and organise laboratories and curricula. However, there were still few chairs authorised by the state (*chaires d'état*). All professors had to have their appointments ratified by authorities in the capital. A consultative committee in Paris

⁹⁰ On Grignard, see Farber, E., *op. cit.*, p. 50; on Haller, see Nye, M. J., "Nonconformity and Creativity", p. 390; and on Sabatier's colleagues, see Nye, M. J., "The Scientific Periphery in France . . .", pp. 400-402.

⁹¹ Weber, Robert L., *Pioneers of Science: Nobel Prize Winners in Physics* (Bristol and London: The Institute of Physics, 1980), pp. 219-220.

⁹² Fohlen, Claude (ed.), *Histoire de Besançon* (Paris: Nouvelle Librairie de France, 1965), II, p. 649. The authors say of Besançon in the early 1960s "many professors of the faculties, especially in medicine and letters, live in Paris". *Ibid.*, p. 649. On Presch, see *Dictionnaire biographique, op. cit.*, p. 232.

established the list of those qualified for posts and it even determined promotions. The *concours* that determined careers were held in Paris. Most student scholarships were still for Paris. Almost all of the best theses were produced in Paris. As late as 1932, Bouglé said: "Almost everyone in the system wants to come to Paris to give proof of his ability and to demonstrate his status."⁹³ He saw as a sign of hope the fact that better salaries might hold certain professors of quality in the provinces. "But as a rule, it is Paris, the unique city which prevails."⁹⁴

Salaries in the provinces were lower than in Paris, but the cost of living was probably also lower there. By a decree of 1881, professors in Paris received salaries of either 12,000 or 15,000 francs; in the provinces six, eight, ten, or 11,000 francs. A professor starting in Paris earned more than one finishing his career in the provinces. The difference, at least in this respect, was quite a substantial one. There were changes, but the gap remained. In the early 1900s provincial physicists averaged about 70 per cent. of the salaries paid to those teaching at the Sorbonne. A decree of 1923 fixed salaries of full-time Parisian professors at 28,000, 26,000 and 24,000 francs; in the provinces, 25,000, 23,000, 21,000, and 19,000 francs.⁹⁵

The intellectual situation of provincial universities could not rival Paris. No city could nourish university professors as the capital did. The authors of a contemporary history of Bordeaux note that "the University remained for a long time a body that was a little marginal in the city". The fact was that "in spite of official encouragement, the circle of intellectual life in the Bordelais and which gravitated toward the University, its libraries and museums, remained extremely limited". The raids on important clusters of professors did not help this situation. At Bordeaux, "the rise of medieval studies was accomplished by L. Halphen, R. Fawtier, and Y. Renouard, all successively called to Paris".⁹⁶

The Hole in the Centre?

Before 1940 the supremacy of Paris in the world of higher learning was accepted by the Ministry of Education. Criticism of the Sorbonne by intellectuals gathered around Charles Péguy in the first and second decades of the century and above all the severe strictures on particular professors uttered by Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde, writing pseudonymously and jointly under the name of "Agathon", were not aimed at the damage done to provincial academic life by the dominance of the Sorbonne. Their criticisms of specialisation, of positivistic zeal for factual details and of triviality of subject-matter in research, and dry-as-dust teaching were not intended to exalt the provincial universities over the Sorbonne. Indeed the concentration of their attack on the Sorbonne demonstrates the extent to

⁹³ Bouglé, Célestin, "La Conception française de l'université de Paris", *Annales de l'Université de Paris*, VIII (July–August 1932), pp. 332–358.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*; and on decree on salaries, *Revue internationale de l'enseignement*, LXXV (1921), pp. 389–392.

⁹⁶ Lajugie, Joseph (ed.), *Bordeaux au XX^e siècle* (Bordeaux: Delmas, 1972), pp. 608, 624, 620.

which the Sorbonne had come to prevail in the academic world. With respect to the intellectual tendencies which Péguy, "Agathon" and others were attempting to block and reverse, the provincial universities were as open to censure as the Sorbonne itself. In that sense, there was consensus in the French university system. The provincial universities accepted the same standards of judgement, the same criteria of choice as the Sorbonne. They accepted them because the Sorbonne accepted them. The dominance of the Sorbonne consisted primarily in the generally unquestioning acceptance of those standards of judgement and criteria of choice.

Would it have been better had it been otherwise? There cannot be much doubt that by and large the Sorbonne attracted the best talents for academic achievement in France. Their actual achievement was very considerable and very general.

But would these talents have been more fruitful had there been less consensus around the standards and criteria applied at the Sorbonne? Would it have been better for the fertility of French academic life if it had been less dominated by the Sorbonne? That it was dominated by the Sorbonne and that the Sorbonne outshone the provincial universities in the quality of achievements seems indubitable. But would the achievements have been greater had the talents not been so concentrated? It is very difficult to say. All that can be said is that when a university like that of Strasbourg developed its own traditions, pride and *esprit de corps*, it made very notable advances. It is true that in the end many of its greatest men ended in Paris, at the Sorbonne and the Collège de France. Nevertheless, the University of Strasbourg, after its return to France, became an intellectually independent power.

But even if it is granted that greater dispersion of academic talents into a number of major subcentres would have served scientific and scholarly creativity and a greater practical fruitfulness better than the concentration in one great centre, another question arises as to whether that was possible. It was not possible given the intellectual, political and administrative traditions of French society.

There will always in any society be a tendency towards an uneven distribution of intellectual talents between centre and periphery or between centre and peripheries. This seems to be an ecological regularity in the spatial pattern of intellectual activities. In France this inherent tendency was greatly accentuated by traditions and practices of governmental policy and by the concentration of extra-academic cultural institutions. The dominance of the Sorbonne was self-maintaining. The prestige of the Sorbonne drew to it the best academic talents of the country; this in turn enhanced its prestige and its attractive power, which caused intellectually and professionally ambitious scientists and scholars to try to make their way there.

These processes of self-maintenance would not, however, have sufficed to make the Sorbonne as dominant as it has been through about a century and a half. Governmental policies of indulgence towards the Sorbonne and

indifference and niggardliness towards the provincial universities added to the tendencies towards self-maintenance.

Even if governments can overcome or set aside their own traditions, can they also set aside the traditions which they have fostered, deliberately and unwittingly, in the institutions which they have made financially dependent on them? It remains to be seen whether this will be so in the future.