There may be one,' he repeated, 'but on two conditions: the man of letters must cease to write so as to be only a Deputy, and he must devote his great gift for using words to solving the major social issues. Politics is vanity, whereas social issues, on the contrary, should haunt the mind of every thinking man. Christianity abolished slavery and replaced it by wage-earning. And wage earners, in their turn, must disappear to be replaced by... I do not know what. One would have to be blind not to see that grave events will soon be taking place.'

I mentioned the name of Gabriele D'Annunzio.²

Zola said sharply, 'Anyone who travels in Italy is struck by the frightful poverty that prevails there. It is in Italy, perhaps, that the formidable problem appears more menacing than anywhere else. In such circumstances, D'Annunzio's electoral platform is surprising: he has had himself nominated not as a sociologist but as a writer and an artist. But what does the freedom of art weigh in the balance, compared with the happiness of mankind?'

It was noon. M. Zola had stood up. The conversation was over.

Ph. Dubois
L'Aurore, 4 November 1897

M. Scheurer-Kestner

What a poignant drama, and what superb characters! Life has brought these documents to our attention, and they are of such tragic beauty that, as a novelist, my heart leaps with admiration and excitement. I know of nothing that is of loftier psychological interest.

It is not my intention to talk about the Affair. Although circumstances have enabled me to examine it and reach a firm opinion concerning it, I cannot overlook the fact that an inquiry is under way, that the matter has not been brought before the courts and that in all decency we must wait, without adding to the clutter of abominable gossip being used to obscure the Affair, which is so clear and simple in itself.

But already, the characters involved in this Affair belong to me; although I am merely a passer-by, my eyes are open, prepared to look at all that life has to offer. And while the man who was sentenced three years ago and the man who is a defendant today are still sacred to me, as long as the judicial system has not fulfilled its task, the third great character in this drama – the accuser – has nothing to fear from being talked about frankly and honestly.

What follows is what I have seen of M. Scheurer-Kestner, what I believe and what I assert. One day, perhaps, if circumstances allow it, I shall talk about the other two characters in the drama.

A life as clear as crystal, utterly clean and upright; not one blemish, not one flaw. A single and unswerving viewpoint, unwarped by any militant ambition, has led to an elevated political position, due solely to the respect and liking of his peers.

And he is no dreamy-eyed Utopian. He is an industrialist who has spent his life in his laboratory devoting himself to specialized research, in addition to the day-to-day cares of being responsible for a large commercial firm.

And I might add that he has a very considerable fortune. Wealth and honours and happinesses of every kind have crowned a pure life, devoted entirely to work and integrity. He has not one thing left to wish for except to end his life in the dignity and joy of his good name.

There you have it; that is what the man is like. Everyone knows him; no one can contradict me. And yet this is the man within whose breast the most tragic and absorbing of dramas is going to be played out. One day, a doubt enters his mind, for already there is some doubt in the air; already it has disturbed more than one conscience. A court martial has found a captain – who perhaps is innocent – guilty of treason. The punishment has been appalling: the captain has been stripped of his rank in public and imprisoned in a remote place; he is the target of an entire people’s loathing; they trample on him as he lies defeated. But great God, what if he were innocent? What a measureless shudder of pity we feel! We break out in a cold sweat at the horrible thought that no amends can possibly make up for the wrong he has suffered.

Doubt did indeed enter M. Scheurer-Kestner’s mind and from that instant, as he himself has explained, his torments began; he was haunted again and again as each new piece of information came to his attention. His intelligent, sturdy, logical mind was gradually overcome by the insatiable need for truth. Nothing could be nobler or more lofty, and what happened within this man is an astonishing spectacle. It arouses my enthusiasm, for it is my profession to examine men’s consciences. There can be no more heroic combat than the struggle to determine the truth and see to it that justice is done.

To cut a long story short, M. Scheurer-Kestner at last feels certain. He knows where the truth lies; he will do what justice requires. This is the excruciating moment. For a mind such as his, I can well imagine how that moment of anguish must have felt. He fully realized what storms he was going to stir up, but truth and justice are sovereign over all else, for they alone make a nation great. Political interests may blot them out

² Gabriele D'Annunzio, famous for his nationalist statements, had just been elected to the Italian Chamber of Deputies.
On the one hand, you have M. Scheurer-Kestner and his crystal-clear

The Dreyfus Affair

momentarily but any nation that did not base its sole raison d'être on truth
and justice would today be a nation doomed.

Revealing the truth is a fine thing, but the revealer's ambition may be to
derive glory from doing so. Some people sell the truth; others wish to derive
some benefit, at least, from having spoken it.

What was M. Scheurer-Kestner's intention, however? To do his duty
and, in so doing, to disappear. He had resolved to tell the government,
'Here is the situation. Take the Affair into your hands; if you choose to
rectify the error, you will have the merit of being just. All acts of justice lead
to triumph.' Because of circumstances which I do not wish to go into, his
words were not heeded.

From that moment on, he began to suffer, and his martydom has con-
tinued for weeks. Rumour had it that he held the truth in his hands; and if
a man knows the truth but does not shout it from the rooftops, then he
must be a public enemy, isn't that so? Stoically at first, for two interminable
weeks, he remained faithful to his promise to keep silent, hoping against
hope that he would not be forced to take the action that certain other
individuals should have taken. And we all know what a tide of invective
and insult engulfed him for those two weeks. But amid that torrent of filthy
accusations, he remained impassive and held his head high. Why did he
keep silent? Why did he not open his file to anyone who asked to see it?
Why did he not do what the others were doing, filling the newspapers with
their gossip?

How great he was! How wise! He kept silent not only because of the
promise he had made but precisely because he was responsible for the truth
—the poor, naked, shivering truth that everyone was hissing and booing
and seemed to have some interest in strangling to death. His only thought
was to shield it from the passion and rage arrayed against it. He had vowed
that no one would steal the truth from him and he intended to choose
exactly when and how he would make the truth triumph. What could be
more natural, more praiseworthy? I know of nothing more sublimely
beautiful than M. Scheurer-Kestner's silence these past three weeks while
an entire panic-stricken nation has suspected and insulted him. Novelists,
there's an exceptional character for you! There's a hero!

His kindest critics aired doubts about his mental health: surely he was a
feeble old man, who had fallen into a sort of infantile senility? Surely the
onset of old age had made him helplessly gullible? And the other critics, a
bunch of madmen and scoundrels, accused him outright of having been
bought. It was very simple: the Jews had paid a million francs in exchange
for his irresponsible behaviour. What an idiotic idea! It should have made
people roar with laughter—and yet no one did.

On the one hand, you have M. Scheurer-Kestner and his crystal-clear

For Humanity, Truth and Justice

life. On the other hand you have the people who are accusing and insulting
him. You must judge. You must choose between him and them. Find what
motivation he could possibly have, aside from his noble need for truth and
justice. Covered with insults, his very soul bruised and rent, feeling his lofty
and respected situation totter beneath him, yet prepared to sacrifice every-
thing in order to accomplish his heroic task, he keeps silent. Calmly, he
waits. The greatness of this man is exceptional.

I have said already that I do not wish to talk about the Affair itself. And yet,
I must repeat, it is as clear and simple as you please once you see it as it
really is.

A miscarriage of justice is a deplorable thing but it can always happen.
Judges do make mistakes; army officers can make mistakes as well. What
would that have to do with the honour of the army? If such a mistake has
occurred, the only thing worth doing is to correct it. No wrongdoing
has taken place—unless someone persists in refusing to acknowledge,
even when confronted with indubitable proof, that a mistake has been
made. At bottom, there is no other problem but that. All will be well once
the people involved make up their minds to acknowledge that an error
may have been made and that afterwards they hesitated because of the
embarrassment of admitting it. Those who know will understand what I
am talking about.

What about the diplomatic complications that might ensue? All that is
merely a smokescreen. No foreign power has had anything to do with the
Affair, and this must be stated loud and clear. The only thing we need be
concerned with is French public opinion, which is exasperated and over-
wrought by the most odious of campaigns. The press is a necessary force;
I believe that when all is said and done, it does more good than harm.
Nonetheless, certain newspapers are the guilty parties, making some
readers panic, terrifying others, feeding on scandals to treble their sales.
Idiotic anti-Semitism has fanned this stupidity into flames. On all sides
people are being denounced. Even the best and purest individuals no longer
dare to do their duty, for fear of getting scorched.

And so we have come to this appalling mess where every type of state-
ment is distorted and no one can plead in favour of justice without being
called senile or a traitor. Lies spread wider and wider, the serious news-
papers gravely print the silliest stories, the entire nation seems to have
gone mad—and yet a little common sense is all it would take to bring
everything back into proportion. I repeat: it will all be simplicity itself the
day the people who are in power dare to behave like decent people, despite
the mob.

One reason why M. Scheurer-Kestner has maintained a dignified silence
before taking action is that he was waiting. I imagine, for each and every
person to examine his own conscience. When he talked about his duty, when he said that even with everything in ruins all about him – his lofty position, his fortune and his happiness – his duty compelled him to speak the truth as soon as he became aware of it, he explained, 'Otherwise I could not have lived with myself.' Admirable words.

And that is exactly what all the decent people who are mixed up in this Affair must say. They will not be able to live with themselves if they do not see to it that justice is done.

If, for political considerations, justice were to be delayed, this would constitute an additional wrong that would merely delay the inevitable outcome and make it even more painful.

The truth is on the march, and nothing shall stop it.

Le Figaro, 25 November 1897

The Syndicate

We know what is behind it: a concept as low and as simple-minded as those who have dreamed it up.

Captain Dreyfus was convicted of the crime of treason by a court martial. From that instant he ceased to be a man and became The Traitor, an abstraction embodying the idea of the fatherland slain and delivered over to a conquering enemy. He stands not only for present treason and future treason but for past treason as well, for our old defeat is blamed on him by those who stubbornly cling to the notion that only because we were

奋战 back with whatever you've got. And I can speak of them impartially, to a conquering enemy. He stands not only for present treason and future treason but for past treason as well, for our old defeat is blamed on him by those who stubbornly cling to the notion that only because we were

fight back with whatever you've got. And I can speak of them impartially, to a conquering enemy. He stands not only for present treason and future treason but for past treason as well, for our old defeat is blamed on him by those who stubbornly cling to the notion that only because we were

... the Jews. The rest is simple: the Jews are rich and powerful, and they have no fatherland of their own; so millions and millions of them are going to work behind the scenes to get him out of trouble; they are going to silence people's consciences with bribes and entangle all France in a detestable plot until the guilty man is rehabilitated, even if it means putting an innocent man in his place. The convicted man's family, also Jewish, of course, comes into the Affair. For an affair it is. No expense will be spared in order to dishonour the system of justice, impose falsehoods, and sully an entire nation through the most insolent of campaigns. And all this in order to save a Jew from infamy and replace him by a Christian.

So, a syndicate is set up. Which means that bankers get together, pool their money and exploit the gullibility of the public. Somewhere there is a fund that pays for all the filth that gets stirred up. It is a vast and sinister undertaking: masked individuals, huge sums handed over at night to unknown characters lurking under bridges, prominent figures corrupted, and fantastic prices paid to undermine their longstanding integrity.

And little by little the syndicate spreads until it becomes an all-powerful organization working away in the shadows, one great shameless conspiracy to glorify the traitor and drown France in a flood of ignominy.

Let's take a closer look at this 'syndicate'.

The Jews have made money, and it is they who openly purchase the honour of their accomplices. Good heavens! I don't know how much they may have spent already, but even if it's only ten million or so, who can blame them for having spent it? These are French citizens, our equals and our brothers, who are being dragged through the mud every single day by such idiotic anti-Semitism. Captain Dreyfus has been used in an attempt to crush them; the crime of one among them has been called the crime of the entire race. Traitors, all of them! They've all sold out; they should all be convicted! And yet you expect these people not to fight back fiercely, not to try to clear themselves, not to give as good as they get? War has been declared on them, a war of extermination! Of course it is their passionate desire to see the innocence of their fellow Jew acknowledged; what could be more understandable? And if they think it is possible to achieve rehabilitation, how whole-heartedly they must be struggling for that goal!

What bothers me is that if there is some teller's window where people get their pay-offs, there aren't any inveterate scoundrels in this syndicate. Come now, you know very well the people I mean. How does it happen that this one, and that one, and that one too are not part of it? In fact, the most amazing thing is that the very people the Jews have supposedly bribed all have unimpeachable reputations for integrity. Maybe the Jews are very particular; maybe they want only the best and rarest merchandise and are willing to pay whatever it's worth. So, I have strong doubts about that teller's window, although at the same time I would be quite prepared to excuse the Jews if they were forced into such a tight corner that they used their millions to defend themselves. When you're being massacred, you fight back with whatever you've got. And I can speak of them impartially, for I neither love them nor hate them. I do not have among them any friend who is close to my heart. They are human beings, and that is all I need to know.

But when it comes to Captain Dreyfus's family, that is a different matter, and anybody who refuses to understand or acknowledge this must be completely heartless. Look here! His family has the right – the duty – to use all its money and its very blood if it believes its child is innocent. That is the sacred threshold that no one has the right to profane. We cannot enter that
house where people weep, where a wife and brothers and parents mourn, unless we enter hat in hand; and only louts can think they are entitled to talk loudly and brazenly. ‘Traitor’s brother!’ That is the insult they fling in the face of that brother! What moral standards are we living by, what God do we acknowledge, that it should be deemed right to blame an entire family for the wrongdoing of one of its members? Nothing could be more contemptible than that; nothing could be more unworthy of our culture and our generosity. The newspapers which insult Captain Dreyfus’s brother because he is doing his duty are a disgrace to the French press.

Who else would have spoken up if he had not? He is playing his proper role. When his voice was heard, seeking justice, no one else needed to play that role any longer; everyone else stepped back. He alone was qualified to raise the formidable question of a possible miscarriage of justice, of the need for a dazzling revelation of the truth. You can heap insult upon injury but that will not alter one whit the notion that the defence of the absent man is in the hands of his own kin, who have maintained their hopes and their faith. And in fact the strongest moral proof of the convicted man’s innocence is the unshakeable certainty of an entire honourable family, whose integrity and patriotism are irreproachable.

Then, after the Jews who founded the syndicate and after the family that is in charge of it, come the ordinary members of the syndicate, the ones who have been bribed. Two of the oldest members are M. Bernard-Lazare and Major Forzinetti. Then there were M. Scheurer-Kestner and M. Monod. Lately, they’ve discovered Colonel Picquart, not to mention M. Leblois. And I devoutly hope that since my first article I too have been considered part of the group. For that matter, anyone who is haunted by the dreadful suspicion that a miscarriage of justice may have occurred and who takes the liberty of wanting the truth to be revealed, for the sake of justice, is a member of the syndicate and is therefore convicted of being an evildoer and of having been bribed.

And who wished this syndicate into existence? Who created it? Why, all of you whose actions have led to this horrendous mess – you, the false patriots and the braying anti-Semites and the mere exploiters who thrive on the public debacle!

Isn’t the proof there before our eyes? Isn’t it complete, and plain as day? If there had been a syndicate there would have been an agreement – but where do you see any such agreement? What there is, is simply this: ever since the wretched man was convicted, certain consciences have felt uneasy and a doubt has arisen as he cries out his innocence to one and all. The dreadful crisis, the collective folly that we are witnessing surely stems from that, from the slight shudder our souls continue to feel. And Major Forzinetti is the man behind this shudder that so many others have felt and that he has described to us in such a poignant way.

Then, there is M. Bernard-Lazare. He is gripped by doubt and he is striving to make things clear, conducting a solitary investigation; but he is groping in the dark. He published first one pamphlet and now a second, on the eve of today’s revelations; and the proof that he was working alone, that he was not in contact with any of the other members of the syndicate, is that he knew nothing about the real truth of the matter and was unable to say a thing about it. What a peculiar syndicate, whose members do not even know each other!

And there was M. Scheurer-Kestner, tortured by his craving for truth and justice, and who was searching and trying to acquire a certainty beyond the shadow of a doubt, quite unaware of the official inquiry – I repeat, official – being conducted at the same time by Colonel Picquart, whose very functions at the War Ministry put him on the right track. It took a chance meeting, as was determined later, for these two men who did not know each other, who were both working towards the same goal but separately, to come together at the very last minute and to move ahead, side by side.

That is the whole story of the syndicate: men of good will, men devoted to truth and justice, starting from every different point on the horizon, working miles apart and unbeknownst to one another but all marching ahead along different trails towards the same goal, trudging ahead in silence, turning over every clod of earth until, one fine morning, they all converged at the same point. Inevitably, they all came together, hand in hand, at that crossroads of truth, that inevitable rendez-vous with justice.

Clearly it is you, is it not, who now bring these men together, you who force them to close ranks, to work towards the same goal of moral health and decency – these very men on whom you heap insults, whom you accuse of plotting in the most infamous way, when all they have tried to do is bring about the supreme act of reparation.

Incessantly, a dozen newspapers, a score of newspapers in which the most diverse passions and interests are interwoven, a whole foul swathe of the press that I cannot read without my heart bursting with indignation, has been convincing the public that a syndicate of Jews, paying fantastic bribes to corrupt decent men, was bent on carrying out the most loathsome plot. Their first aim was to save the traitor and replace him by an innocent man; then, it was the army itself that would be dishonoured and France that would be sold to the enemy, as it was in 1870. I will spare you the details, the flights of fancy concerning this sordid machination.

And I must admit that this view had become the view held by the vast
majority of the public. How many ordinary people have come up to me in the past week to ask, dumbfounded, ‘What? Are you trying to say that Scheurer-Kestner is not a scoundrel? And you’re throwing in your lot with the likes of him? But don’t you realize that those people have sold France down the river?’

My heart trembles with anxiety because I can see that leading the public astray like this will enable them to hide anything they wish. And the worst part is that precious few individuals are courageous enough to try swimming upstream, against the current. Any number of people will whisper in your ear that they are convinced Captain Dreyfus is innocent but that when it comes to fighting they don’t care to find themselves in a tight corner!

Behind public opinion, and counting no doubt on its support, are the offices of the Ministry of War. I do not wish to speak about them today, for I still have hopes that justice will be done. But can anyone fail to realize that we are face to face with bad faith of the most obstinate kind? They refuse to admit that they have made mistakes – I was about to say, that they are guilty of misdeeds. Individuals have been compromised, and they persist in covering up for them. They will go to all lengths to dodge the broom that would make one gigantic clean sweep. Matters are so serious that the very people who hold the truth in their hands, who are being furiously urged to reveal it, are still hesitating, still reluctant to shout out the truth for all to hear, because they hope the truth will become obvious all by itself and they will be spared the embarrassment of telling it.

But there is at least one truth that I would like to announce throughout France this very minute: France – just and generous France – is being forced to commit a genuine crime. France cannot possibly be France any longer if it can be duped to this extent, whipped to a frenzy against a poor unfortunate man who for the past three years, and in the most atrocious conditions, has been expiating a crime he did not commit. Yes, far far away, on a remote island, under the glaring sun, there is a human being who has been separated from his fellow men. Not only does the vast ocean come between him and them but, in addition, he is enclosed night and day within a living wall formed by eleven guards. Eleven men have been immobilized to guard a single man. Never has any killer, any raving madman been walled up so closely. And what of the everlasting silence? the slow agony of being loathed by an entire people? Now, do you dare say that man is not guilty?

Yes, that is exactly what we say – we, the members of the syndicate. We say it to France, and we hope that France will hear us at last, for France is always ardent in support of just and righteous causes. We say to France that we are striving for the honour of the army and the greatness of the nation. A miscarriage of justice has been committed, and as long as it has not been corrected, France will be weak and sickly and will suffer as from a secret cancer gnawing at its flesh. If some of its limbs must be amputated in order to make France healthy again, then let them be amputated!

Ours is a syndicate to act on public opinion, to cure it of the frenzy into which the foul press has whipped it up, and restore it to its age-old dignity and generosity; a syndicate to repeat every morning that our diplomatic relations are not at stake, that the honour of the army is not in doubt, that only certain individuals may be compromised; a syndicate to demonstrate that any miscarriage of justice can be corrected; and that to perpetuate an error of that sort, on the grounds that a court martial cannot be wrong, is the most monstrous kind of obstinacy, the most blind and appalling belief in infallibility; a syndicate that will continue campaigning until the truth has been revealed, until justice has been rendered despite all the obstacles, even if years of struggle are required – of that syndicate I am a member, have no doubt about it! And I devoutly hope that every decent person in France will become a member!

Le Figaro, 1 December 1897

At the same time Zola granted an interview to a Russian journalist, Eugen Semenov, who published it in the St Petersburg Novosti on 30 November. The editors of Le Matin, in Paris, always on the lookout for sensational items, managed to publish a translation of it a few days later.

Conversation with M. Zola

Novosti – A book about Dreyfus – Historical narrative.

Mr E. Semenov, the Paris correspondent of the Novosti, has published an interview with M. Emile Zola, with this title, in the latest number of that journal. We reproduce it here as a matter of documentary interest. ‘Your opinion with regard to the Dreyfus Affair is clearly conveyed in your article. I have come to see you, not to pry in the hope of eliciting sensational replies, but simply to ask you the following. Do you intend to make use of this exceptionally dramatic affair as subject matter for one of your forthcoming books?’ ‘If you were a French journalist, I would not tell you a thing, and you can immediately see why. But since you write in Russian and for a Russian
For instance, they maintain that there is no connection between the Esterhazy affair and the Dreyfus Affair. The idiocy of it is staggering, since Esterhazy is accused of having written a bordereau on the strength of which Dreyfus was convicted.

'As for General Billot and M. Meline, when they invoke the honour of the army, they remind me of Rouher² brandishing the dread spectre of revolution, in the days of the Second Empire. All Rouher needed to do was talk about the "red spectre", and immediately the legislature became docile. Today, it is just the same: all you need do is talk about "the honour of the army" and every shade of opposition falls silent and all the Deputies prostrate themselves.

'Today, the army concerns everybody, since every Frenchman is a soldier. "Attacking the army" - what does that mean? It's a nonsensical expression. When Esterhazy was brought before the first court martial, did he represent the entire army? And does General Billot take the side of that individual? If Esterhazy is not a traitor, he has at least the makings of one.

'Such pathetic people! At any other time they would be laughable. Isn't it comical to see former revolutionaries who were once convicted by courts martial claim that courts martial are infallible?

'I can tell you about courts martial. I saw how they worked in 1871. On a number of occasions I tried to rescue friends who had fallen into their clutches. So I know how they arrive at their verdicts. And I assure you, it's worse than your wildest imaginings.

'No, there is no such thing as a court that is infallible. In fact, military judges, acting in good faith, are even more likely than all other judges to convict an innocent man.

'That is what the despicable politicians do not wish to acknowledge; that is why they are infamous. I cannot find words strong enough, do you see, to express the scorn and revulsion they make me feel. If you find one, use it. I shall be grateful to you.'

M. Zola stood up and accompanied me to the door.

'What consequences do you think yesterday's vote may have?'

'None whatsoever,' he replied as we went down the stairs. 'Our Deputies are mere puppets who bustle about in a void. Their words vanish on the wind. They will not prevent the truth from continuing its onward march any more than clouds that momentarily darken the sky can prevent the daylight from reaching us.'

A glass-paned door led to the vestibule. As M. Zola stood in the doorway, he added,

² Eugene Rouher (1814–84) was an influential politician during the Second Empire. His rejection of liberalization led France into the conflict with Germany and the disastrous battle of Sedan.
against anyone who was visibly on the side of darkness and despotism. In that Quarter burned the sacred flame, the splendid folly that inhabits twenty-year-olds, so certain that all hopes will be realized and that tomorrow will bring the triumph of the ideal City.

And if we delve further into the history of the noble passions that have made the young people of our great schools rise up, we will find that injustice has always aroused their indignation, that they have always opposed the fierce and the powerful on behalf of the humble, the abandoned and the persecuted. Our young people have demonstrated in favour of the oppressed peoples, they have been on Poland's side and Greece's side, they have defended whoever was suffering and dying from the brutality of a mob or a despot. Whenever the Latin Quarter was reported to be ablaze with passion, you could be sure of what was behind that: an outburst of some juvenile love of justice, scornful compromise, spurred by heartfelt enthusiasm. And how spontaneous it all was! how they flowed through the streets, like a river at the flood!

Oh, I'm well aware of what the pretext is, even today: France is in danger, the country has been handed over to a victorious enemy by a gang of traitors. But I ask you: where will we ever find a clear intuition of things, an instinctive feel for what is true and just, if not in these fresh new souls, in these young people who are just entering political life, whose good and upright reasoning should not yet be obscured by anything? That politicians, sullied by years of intrigue, or journalists, unbalanced by all the compromises inherent in their profession, should swallow the most impudent lies and close their eyes to what is blindingly obvious — that is understandable, that we can grasp. But the young people! The gangrene must be in an advanced stage already if the purity and natural frankness of youth do not cry out in the midst of the unacceptable errors, if they do not point straight to what is obvious and limpid in the full and honest light of day!

The story could not be simpler. An officer was found guilty; and no one would dream of impugning the judges' good faith. They sentenced him as their consciences dictated, on the basis of evidence they believed unshakeable. And then, one day, a man, several men, had doubts and ultimately became convinced that one of the pieces of evidence — the most important one, at any rate the only piece on which the judges publicly based their decision — had been wrongly attributed to the condemned man, that beyond all doubt that piece of evidence was in another man's handwriting. So they speak up, and that other man is denounced by the prisoner's brother, whose strictest duty it was to denounce him; and, inevitably, a new trial begins, which will lead to a revision of the first trial, if a sentence is handed out. Isn't all of that perfectly clear, just and reasonable? Is any part of that a machination, a dark plot to spare a traitor? That there has been a traitor, no one denies; the only thing anyone asks is that a guilty man and not an innocent one should expiate that crime. You'll have your traitor, all right; the only aim is to give you an authentic traitor.

Shouldn't a little common sense be enough? What could possibly be motivating the men who urge a revision of Dreyfus's trial? Forget the imbecilic anti-Semitism, the ferocious monomania which insists there is a Jewish plot, claiming that Jewish gold is determined to replace a Jew with a Christian in that infamous jail. It won't hold up; the improbabilities and impossibilities collapse on top of one another. All the gold in the world couldn't possibly buy certain men's consciences. In the end, we have to acknowledge reality, which is the natural, gradual, invincible expansion of any miscarriage of justice. It all boils down to that. A miscarriage of justice is an ongoing force; men with a moral sense are first won over, then haunted, and finally they dedicate themselves ever more stubbornly at the risk of their fortunes and their lives until justice is done. There is no other conceivable explanation for what is happening today; all the rest is but a magma of inflamed feelings, political and religious, an overflowing torrent of calumny and insults.

But what excuse would youth have if its concepts of humanity and justice were to be clouded over even for an instant! During its session on 4 December, a French Chamber covered itself with shame by voting a motion 'harshly condemning the ringleaders of the odious campaign which is disturbing the public's peace of mind'. I firmly declare — for the benefit of the future which will, I hope, read these words — that such a vote is unworthy of our generous country and will remain an ineradicable blot on our honour. 'The ringleaders' are men of conscience and courage; certain that a miscarriage of justice has been committed, they have denounced it so that it can be made good, and have done so out of the patriotic conviction that any great nation in which an innocent man is left to writhe in torture is a nation doomed. 'The odious campaign' is those men's cry for truth and justice; it is their obstinate determination that in the gaze of other peoples, France will continue to be the compassionate nation which once brought the world liberty and will now bring justice. As you can clearly see, that Chamber has surely committed a crime since it has made even the young people of our great schools rotten to the core, and now those young people deceived, misled, unleashed to run about our streets — are doing something we had never witnessed before: they are demonstrating against all that is proudest, bravest and most divine in the human soul!

After the Senate session on the 7th, it was noised about that M. Scheurer-Kestner had suffered a disaster. Oh yes, what a disaster, indeed, in his heart and soul! I can just imagine the anguish and torment he must have felt when he saw everything he loved about our Republic collapse about him, everything he had helped it to gain by fighting the good fight all his life.
long: liberty first of all, then the manly virtues of fairness, frankness and civic courage.

He is one of the last of his stalwart generation. In the days of the Second Empire, he knew what it meant for a people to be subject to the authority of a single man, to be devoured by feverish impatience, their mouths brutally gagged, unable to denounce injustice. He witnessed our defeats and his heart bled; he knew what had caused them all - blindness, despotic imbecility. Later, he was one of those who laboured most wisely and most ardently to raise up the country again from its ruins and restore its rank among the nations of Europe. He dates back to the heroic days of our republican France, and I imagine he may have justifiably believed that he had done good, solid work, that despotism had been done away with forever and freedom won. By freedom I mean the human freedom that enables every single conscience to speak as its duty requires, secure in the tolerance of all other opinions.

Well, it was true! All of that had been won! But now it all lies in shambles once again. Within him and all around him are nothing but ruins. Now it is a crime to have been obsessed by the need for truth. It is a crime to have striven for justice. Despotism has come back in all its horror; mouths are harshly gagged once again. This time it is not the boot of a Caesar stamping out the public conscience: no, this time an entire Chamber castigates those who are inflamed by a passion for justice. No speaking out! Fists crush lips that try to defend truth; crowds are whipped up into mobs to reduce isolated protesters to silence. Never has such monstrous oppression been organized and used to put down open discussion. Shameful terror reigns, the most courageous are cowed, no one dares say anything about what he thinks, for fear of being denounced as a traitor or as someone who has sold out to traitors. The few newspapers that are still decent prostrate themselves before their readers, who ultimately lose their wits because of the stupid stories that have been fed to them. I do believe that no nation has ever known a darker, more troubled hour, a more disturbing one for its history.

Yes, true enough, the whole of that great and fair-minded past must have collapsed about M. Scheurer-Kestner. If he is still able to believe in the goodness and fairness of men, his optimism must be unshakeable. Every day for the past three weeks he has been dragged through the mud because he has insisted on being just, jeopardizing, in the process, the honour and joy of his old age. For a decent man, no distress can be more painful than to be martialed for his decency. This man’s faith in tomorrow has been slain. He is the very last representative of Alsace-Lorraine in our legislature - and yet this is the man they have singled out in their wish to slap patriotism in the face! They dare to say he has sold out, they dare to label him a traitor, an insulter of the army, when his name should have been enough to reassure the most suspicious doubters. No doubt it was naive of him to believe that his status as an Alsatian and his renown as an ardent patriot would suffice to guarantee his good faith in playing the difficult role of dispenser of justice. The very fact that he was involved in this Affair should have clearly signified that he felt its prompt conclusion was essential to the honour of the army and the honour of our country. Let it drag on for weeks more, try to stifle the truth and turn a blind eye to justice, and you’ll soon see that you’ve become the laughing stock of all Europe and you’ve relegated France to the lowest rank among all nations!

But no, no, the simple-minded political and religious passions will not listen to anything, and the students of France offer the world a dismal spectacle: they go and hiss M. Scheurer-Kestner, the ‘traitor’, the man who has sold out, the man who insults our army and compromises our country!

I am well aware that the few young people who are demonstrating are not the entire younger generation. I know that one hundred rowdies out in the street make more noise than ten thousand workers, studiously staying home. But those one hundred rowdies are one hundred too many. And what a dismal symptom it is that such a movement, no matter how limited it may be, can take place in our Latin Quarter today!

Can young people be anti-Semites? Is that possible? Can it be that their fresh new brains and souls have already been deranged by that idiotic poison? How very sad, how disturbing a prospect for the twentieth century that is about to begin! One hundred years after the Declaration of the Rights of Man, one hundred years after that supreme act of tolerance and emancipation, we are reverting to wars of religion, to the most obnoxious and inane type of fanaticism! It may be understandable in certain men who have their role to play, an attitude to keep up and an all-devouring ambition to satisfy. But in the young! in those who are born and who grow so that all the rights and freedoms we dreamt the coming century would be resplendent with can flourish! They are the long-awaited architects of that dream - and what do they do but proclaim their anti-Semitism! They will begin the century by massacring all the Jews, their fellow citizens, because they are of a different race and a different faith? Is this the way to take possession of the City of our dreams, the City of equality and fraternity? If youth had really come to that, it would be enough to make a man weep, enough to make him deny all hope and all human happiness.

Oh youth, I beg of you, think of the great task that awaits you. You are the workmen of the future. You will lay the foundations of the next century which, we firmly believe, will resolve the problems of fairness and truth
We are going through a frightful time of moral confusion; the public’s conscience appears to be clouding over. At this time, France, it is to you that I must speak, to the nation, to the mother country.

Every morning, France, when I read in the papers what you seem to think of this lamentable Dreyfus Affair, my stupification increases, my reason rebels still more. Is it possible that you, France, have come to this? Have you really been convinced by the most blatant lies? Are you really siding with the evildoers and their muck, against a few decent individuals? Are you really losing your head on the asinine pretext that your enemy has been insulted and there is a plot to sell you to the enemy? Why, the wisest and most loyal of your children have in fact but one desire: that, as all Europe turns its eyes attentively towards you, you should remain the nation of honour, of humanity, truth and justice.

Indeed, the general public has come to that, especially the little people, the humblest people in the towns and almost everywhere in the provinces and in the country, that great majority of the people who accept what their newspapers or their neighbours tell them, who have no way of gathering information for themselves, no way of stopping to think for themselves. France, what has happened? How have your goodhearted, commonsensical people let fear make them so ferocious and intolerance plunge them into such darkness? Your people are told that a man who may be innocent is being tortured in the most appalling way; there is moral and material evidence that a revision of his trial is indispensable — and yet your
people flatly refuse to see the light, they hide behind the scoundrels and the
sectarians who find it in their interest to let the body stay buried. Are these
the same people who not long ago would have torn down the Bastille all
over again to rescue a single prisoner from it?

What anguish, what sadness in the souls of all those who love you,
France, who strive for your honour and your grandeur! With what distress
I behold these rough and stormy seas and try to discern the causes of the
tempest that threatens to make your greatest glory founder. Nothing could
be more deadly serious; no symptoms could be more alarming. I will dare to
speak out, for all my life I have had but one passion: the truth, and I am
merely continuing my life's work.

Don't you realize that the danger lies precisely in the wilful obscurationism
of public opinion? Day after day a hundred different newspapers repeat
again and again that public opinion does not want Dreyfus to be innocent,
that his guilt is essential to the country's salvation. But France, don't you
realize how very guilty you would be if your leaders allowed themselves to
use such a sophism to stifle the truth? It would be the fault of France itself
for having insisted on finding a crime, and then what a responsibility
France would bear one day! That is why those of your sons who love you
and honour you, France, have but one ardent duty in this gravest hour: to
act powerfully on public opinion; to enlighten it and rescue it from the error
towards which blind passions are steering it. There is no more useful, more
sacrosanct task than this.

Oh, I'll speak to them, all right - with all my might. I'll speak to the little
people, the humble people who are being poisoned and forced into
delirium. That and that alone is the mission I assign myself. I will cry out to
them where the country's soul and its invincible energy and its
undoubted triumph really spring from.

Let's see where things stand. A new step has just been taken: Major
Esterhazy has been summoned before a court martial. As I have been
saying from the very first day, the truth is on the march and nothing shall
stop it. Despite the attempts to stand in its way, every step forward will be
taken, mathematically, in due time. The truth carries a power within it
that sweeps away all obstacles. And whenever its way is barred, whenever
someone does succeed in burying it for any time at all, it builds up under-
ground, gathering such explosive violence that the day it bursts out at last
it blows up everything with it. Just try to keep it walled up a few months
longer behind lies or behind closed doors, and ultimately you'll see that you
have paved the way for the most shattering disaster.

But as truth moves forward the lies pile up, denying that truth is on the
march. Nothing could be more significant. When General de Pellieux, in
charge of the preliminary inquiry, submitted his report which came to the

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and if that piece of evidence is enough to prove that other person guilty, then a revision of the trial is indispensable – the logic requiring it is undeniable, for it is not possible to declare two people guilty of the same crime. Maitre Demange has repeated, officially, that the only piece of evidence communicated to him was the bordereau; Dreyfus was legally found guilty only on the strength of that bordereau, and, even supposing that in defiance of all the rules of legal proceedings there are pieces of evidence that have been kept secret (personally, I cannot believe that), who would dare to refuse a revision once it was proven that the bordereau – the only known, acknowledged piece of evidence – is in another man’s handwriting? And that is why there has been such an accumulation of lies concerning that bordereau, for it is at the very heart of the entire Affair.

Here, then, is the first point to be noted: to a large extent public opinion is arrived at on the basis of those lies, those idiotic and extraordinary tales the press prints every morning. The time will come when responsibilities will have to be taken and accounts will have to be settled with the foul press that dishonours us in the eyes of the whole world. Some of those newspapers are perfectly at home in that role; they’ve never done anything else but sling mud. But how astonishing and sad it is to find that among them is L’Echo de Paris, a literary sheet that is so often in the vanguard of ideas and yet here it is playing such a nasty role in this Dreyfus Affair! Its articles are scandalously violent and prejudiced – and unsigned. It is said that the people behind them are the very ones who were so disarmingly clumsy as to have Dreyfus found guilty. Does M. Valentin Simond realize that they cover his paper with shame? And there is another paper whose attitude should smite the conscience of all decent people; I refer to Le Petit Journal. If the insidious broadsheets that have a circulation of only a few thousand howl and lie in order to boost their circulation, that is understandable, and besides it does only limited harm. But when Le Petit Journal, with a circulation of over one million, which speaks to the ordinary people and reaches everywhere, disseminates error and leads public opinion astray, then matters are exceptionally grave. When a newspaper has such a moral responsibility, when it is the spiritual leader of such a large flock, it must be of the most scrupulous intellectual integrity lest it commit crimes against the public good.

And that, France, is the first thing I find in the madness that is sweeping you away: the lies in the press, the diet of inept farce, low insults and moral depravity that it feeds you every morning. How could you possibly demand truth and justice when they are doing so much to denature your legendary virtues, the clarity of your intelligence and the sturdiness of your reasoning?

But there are facts that are more serious still, a whole set of symptoms which turn the crisis you are going through into a terrifying lesson, for anyone who knows how to see and judge. The Dreyfus Affair is merely a deplorable incident. The terrible thing that must be admitted is the way you are behaving throughout this business. You look healthy enough – but suddenly little blotches appear on the skin: death is there, inside you. All the political and social poison you have absorbed suddenly breaks out on your face.

Why did you let them get away with it when they shouted that your army was being insulted? (and why did you ultimately shout it too?) whereas all that the ardent patriots wanted was to defend the army’s dignity and honour. What is your army, after all? Why, today, it is you, it is all of France. The army is not just a certain chief, not just a certain officers’ corps, not just the bemedalled higher ranks. The army is all of your children, ready to defend France’s soul. Ask yourself frankly: was it really your army you were rushing to defend when no one was attacking it? What you suddenly needed to cheer on was the sabre itself – isn’t that the truth? We’re told that the chiefs were insulted, but personally, what I hear, in the noisy ovation they are given, is the reawakening (unconscious, no doubt) of the latent Boulangism you are still infected with. The blood that flows in your veins is not yet republican blood. Whenever any plumes and ribbons go parading by, your heart beats faster! Whenevers a king comes along, you fall in love with him! You’re not thinking of your army at all – you just want to go to bed with its general! How very remote from all that the Dreyfus Affair is! While General Billot was being cheered in the Chamber, I could see the shadow of the sabre taking shape on the wall. France, if you’re not careful, you’re heading straight for dictatorship.

And do you know where else you’re headed, France? To the Church. You’re going back to the past, the past filled with intolerance and theocracy that your most illustrious children wrestled with and thought they had slain by sacrificing their intelligence and their blood. Today, the tactics of anti-Semitism are very simple. In vain did Catholicism try to influence the people by creating workers’ associations and calling for pilgrimage after pilgrimage; it failed to win over the people and bring them to kneel before the altar again. It was all over; the churches remained empty, the people no longer believed. And now what has happened? Circumstances have made it possible to breathe the anti-Semitic madness into the people; they are being poisoned with this fanaticism, hurled into the streets howling, ‘Down with the Jews! Death to the Jews!’ What a triumph it would be if a religious war could be unleashed! No, no, the people are not believers any more; but isn’t this the first step towards making believers of them – starting the old medieval intolerance all over again, burning Jews in public? Anyhow, the poison has been found; and once the people of France have been turned into fanatics and executioners, once their generosity and their love for the hard-won rights of man have been wrenched out of their hearts, God no doubt will do the rest.
They have the nerve to denying the reactionary clericalism. Yet it’s everywhere you look – in politics, in the arts, in the press, in the streets! Today it’s Jews who are being persecuted, tomorrow it will be Protestants; already the campaign is beginning. The Republic is overrun by reactionaries of every stripe; they adore it with a harsh and terrifying love, they stifle it with kisses. All you hear, on all sides, is that the idea of freedom is bankrupt. And when the Dreyfus Affair broke out, it supplied the growing hatred of freedom with an astonishing opportunity; passions began to blaze, even in the most oblivious people. Can’t you see why they hurled themselves so furiously at M. Scheurer-Kestner? Because he is of a generation that believed in freedom and strove for freedom. Today, people shrug their shoulders and laugh mockingly: obsolete old fuddy-duddies, they call them. If M. Scheurer-Kestner is defeated, that will complete the ruin of the Republic’s founders, the ruin of all who are dead and whom they’ve tried to bury in the mud. Those founders spurned the sabre and left the Church, and that is why Scheurer-Kestner, that great and decent man, is vilified today. They have to drown him in shame so that the Republic itself will be sullied and washed away.

And in addition, this Dreyfus Affair reveals in broad daylight all the nasty politicking that goes on in smoke-filled back rooms; it besmirches the parliamentary system and will do it in. Unfortunately for the Affair, it comes towards the end of the legislative session, when there are only three or four months left in which to rig the next session. Naturally, the government that is currently in power wants to hold elections, and the Deputies are just as determined to get themselves re-elected. So, rather than let portfolios out of their grasp, rather than compromise their chances of election, they are determined to take the most extreme steps. A drowning man could not cling more convulsively to his lifebuoy. That is the crux, that’s what explains everything. First of all, the government’s extraordinary attitude in this Dreyfus Affair, its silence, its hesitation, the wicked deed it is doing by letting the country agonize amid imposture, when it was the government itself that was responsible for establishing the truth; and then the limp and cowardly lack of interest shown by the Deputies, who pretend they don’t know what’s going on. They are afraid of only one thing: compromising their re-election by alienating the people, whom they believe to be anti-Semitic. They keep telling you over and over again, ‘Ah, if only you would hold elections! you’d see how the government and the parliament would settle the Dreyfus Affair in twenty-four hours!’ And that’s how the smoke-filled-room politicking of the parliamentary system brings low a great people!

So that, France, is how your public opinion is still determined: by a need for sabres and reactionary clericalism dragging you several centuries back-ward, by the overweening ambition of those who govern you, gobble you up and refuse to stop gorging on you!

France, I beg of you, come to your senses, be yourself again, be that great country, France.

Single-handed, anti-Semitism has perpetrated two sensational affairs that have done so much harm to France: the Panama Canal Affair and the Dreyfus Affair. Do you remember how the foul press used denunciations, spread abominable gossip and published false or stolen documents until the Panama business became a hideous ulcer that ate away at the country for years, making it weaker and weaker? The press drove public opinion wild; the entire nation was perverted, intoxicated; the entire nation saw red, demanded figures, decreed that the Parliament was rotten to the core and clamoured for a mass execution of all its members. Ah, if only Arton would come back! If only Arton would speak up! Well, come back he did, and speak up he did. Then all the lies spread by the foul press were revealed as hollow fabrications. And in fact public opinion abruptly swung to the opposite extreme, refusing so much as to suspect a single guilty person and insisting on a mass acquittal! Now, I don’t suppose that everyone actually had a clear conscience, for what had happened was what happens in every Parliament in the world when big companies are handling millions and millions. But ultimately the public was nauseated by all the filth; too many people had been smeared, too many had been denounced, and finally the public felt an overriding need to wash it all away and breathe pure air. It needed to believe that everyone was innocent.

Well, I predict that this is what will happen with the Dreyfus Affair, the other crime against society perpetrated by anti-Semitism. Once again, the foul press is saturating the public too heavily with lies and calumny. The press is over determined to turn decent people into knaves, and knaves into decent people. It is spreading so many idiotic stories that finally even children stop believing them. It is arousing too many denials, going too much against the grain of sheer common sense and integrity. One of these days the public will suddenly gag on all the filth it has been fed. It is bound to happen. And just as in the Panama Canal scandal, you’ll see that in this Dreyfus Affair as well, the public will bring its weight to bear. In an outpouring of sovereign generosity, the public will decide there are to be no more traitors; it will call for truth and justice. Thus, anti-Semitism will be tried and sentenced for its evil deeds, for the two mortally dangerous follies it has led this country into and for the loss of dignity and health this country has suffered as a result.

France, that is why I beseech you, come back to your senses now; do not wait any longer. The truth cannot be told to you now, since the matter is before the courts and we have no choice but to believe they will reveal the
truth. At this point only the judges have the floor. No one else will have a
duty to speak out unless the judges fail to reveal the whole truth, the
simple truth. But don't you already suspect what that truth is? First
there was a mistake; then came all the misdeeds for the sake of hiding
that mistake. The facts have been so eloquent that every phase of the
investigation has been an admission: Major Esterhazy given the benefit of
inexplicable protection again and again; Colonel Picquart treated as if he
were the guilty party and suffering outrageous insults, the Ministers play­
ing on words, the unofficial newspapers lying in their teeth, the initia­

inquiry merely groping about with desperate slowness. Don't you agree
there's a rotten stench? Doesn't it reek of dead bodies? Don't you agree
they must really have a great many things to hide since they openly let them­selves be defended by all the scoundrels in Paris, while decent people are
clamouring for a ray of light, even though their doing so prevents them
from leading peaceful lives?

France, awaken! Think of your glory! Is it possible that your liberal
middle class and your emancipated people do not realize what a senseless
scandal they have been tricked into? I cannot believe they are accomplices
to it. They must have been fooled, since they are not aware that two things
lie behind it: military dictatorship and reactionary clericalism. France, is
that what you want? Do you want to jeopardize all that you have paid for
so dearly: religious tolerance, equality of justice for all, fraternal solidar­
ity among all of your citizens? If there is the slightest doubt about Dreyfus's
guilt and if in spite of that doubt you leave him to languish as an outcast,
that is enough to compromise your glorious conquest of law and liberty
forever. Will there really be only a handful of us to say these things out
loud? Won't we be joined by all of your children, all the decent individuals,
all the free spirits, all the generous souls who founded the Republic and
should be trembling to see it in such frightful danger?

France, those are the people I appeal to! They must group together! They
must write; they must speak up. They must work with us to enlighten the
people's hearts. You are the radiant centre of our apotheosis, for the
Russian alliance has been indeed, for France, a patriotic celebration. And
now you are about to preside over our World Fair. What a solemn triumph
it will be, the crowning touch on our grand century of diligent labour,
truth and liberty. But what a blot on your name (I was about to say, on
your reign) this abominable Dreyfus Affair is! A court martial, acting on
orders, has just dared to acquit such a man as Esterhazy. Truth itself and
justice itself have been slapped in the face. And now it is too late, France's
dishonour has been sullied by that supreme insult, and History will record
that it was during your Presidency that such a crime against society was
committed.

They have dared to do this. Very well, then, I shall dare too. I shall tell
the truth, for I pledged that I would tell it, if our judicial system, once the
matter was brought before it through the normal channels, did not tell
the truth, the whole truth. It is my duty to speak up; I will not be an
accessory to the fact. If I were, my nights would be haunted by the spectre
of that innocent man so far away, suffering the worst kind of torture as he
pays for a crime he did not commit.

And it is to you, M. le Président, that I will shout out the truth with all
the revulsion of a decent man. To your credit, I am convinced that you
are unaware of the truth. And to whom should I denounce the evil

1 In December 1895 Drumont, in his Libre Parole, had unleashed a campaign aimed at Faure's
father-in-law.