

THE GREAT CHARLES

By Malcolm Muggeridge

PROBABLY now De Gaulle has developed the acute megalomania which sooner or later afflicts those in supreme authority, especially in an age of mass communications and excessive sycophancy like ours. He saw himself as a man of destiny even before he became one. Heaven knows what his present state of mind must be, especially since, on top of his congenital *oite de grandeur*, according to some accounts he is nowadays mentally confused to the point of embarrassing his colleagues. His physical condition likewise gives cause for worry.

I first set eyes on De Gaulle in 1951 in the lift of the Connaught Hotel where he was then staying. His presence was frosty and gauche, but still decidedly impressive. I always thought of him as a man apart. His great height, his Cynanose, his awkward movements, all added to this impression. He seemed to have no connection even with the ornate war and his macabre rivalries, with Monty's slang, Churchillian rhetoric. Forces of humour, and other gesticulations for keeping his morale. His gaze was fixed elsewhere.

No Familiarity

With some of his entourage, like Soustelle and Passy, I had dealings and so got to know them. They treated him with a mixture of devotion and even affection, but there was no familiarity. It has been suggested by his detractors (for instance, by Robert Menin in his *No Laurels for De Gaulle*) that he favoured extreme Rightists. Actually, if there were some former *collaborateurs* among his inner circle there were also fellow-travellers and I dare say, even an occasional Party member. Neither the one nor the other subsequently did De Gaulle fall in with the fashion for seeing our times as a Western in which a good guy and a bad guy contend together, the ultimate victory of the former being of course assured. This enabled him to avoid both the ridiculous raptures over Stalin and the USSR and the raptures over Churchill. The Times and most of those set in authority over us succumbed at the time of Yalta, and equally the frenzied and unedifying anti-Communist obsessions which have so distorted American thinking and statesmanship in the post-war years. Passy told me that on one occasion, in June 1941, when the *Wehrmacht* had just invaded Russia, De Gaulle sat listening to radio reports of German successes on the new Eastern Front in the company of a number of Allied officers. They were talking, as most of them did at that time, with ill-disguised satisfaction of how the Germans would go through the USSR like a knife through butter. De Gaulle remained silent. They asked him for his views. "I was thinking," he replied, "qu'il faudra desormais employer un moyen d'arreter la progression communiste en Europe". It was a cool and perceptive judgment. The same attitude has enabled him, representative, as he is of whatever remains valid in European conservatism to-day, to be received as an honourable member of the Kremlin with a warmth and cordiality accorded to no other statesman from the west.

It is often forgotten how incredibly weak his position was in London in the war years. He lacked everything—money, friends, resources, an appealing personality and a facility for the sort of rhetorical claptrap which war necessitates. I saw some of his troops arriving at Cherbourg, and I noted when they were quartered in Olympia. Not even Falstaff had so degraded a company. De Gaulle was a very well known figure. He would have liked some other eminent Frenchman to provide a focus for opposition to the Stalin regime, and he had toyed with the lunatic notion of getting Weingand over. Later, he had to reckon with the unremitting hostility of Roosevelt, who used him as a tease

An Interview

Acting on this hunch, I sought to be accorded an interview with him at about the lowest point in his fortunes, when he had only a handful of followers in the *Assemblee*, among them the faithful Soustelle. He received me in the Rue Solferino, seated at a desk which seemed grotesquely too big for his head. He was in a mood to accommodate his massive bulk; his head tiny by comparison. One does not, of course, interview De Gaulle: one listens, managing at best to interpose an occasional word. Almost without taking breath he explained to me, with an unworkable political system, so that a conspiracy to the sort of scam that had come to the top in the Fourth Republic, there would infallibly be a breakdown in due course and a call for him to take over. I managed with great difficulty to put a question—one I had often puzzled over. Why, when he headed a government at

the end of the war, did he not use the unlimited power he then had to institute a better, more workable system? He looked at me with the icy ferocity he reserves for awkward questioners and roared out that it was not the right moment. Then the monologue was resumed. At the end I meekly asked him what he proposed to do now. This time he looked benignly at me, and said with great complacency: "J'attends". As we now know, his waiting was not to be in vain. With a characteristic stroke, having used the slogan *Algerie Francaise* to get into power, he proceeded at an appropriate moment to hand Algeria over to the Algerians, thereby ensuring staying in power. In politics it is necessary to be a man of straw, to betray either the electorate or the country. He preferred the former course.

His prowess as a general is dubious, and in any case untested; he has never, in point of fact, conducted military operations on any scale. As a politician, however, he is incomparable. His television appearances (carefully rehearsed before a mirror with the aid of a man from the *Comedie Francaise*) are superb; his electioneering methods more reminiscent of a Kennedy than of a St. Cyr. After his election, his hands are bleeding and swollen (stigmata of universal suffrage democracy) like Lyndon Johnson's. This is the impression that Soustelle describes what happens: "To say that he mixes with the crowd is an understatement; he plunges into it, wading in it. One can keep an eye on him not so much because of his height, but because he is the virtual centre of a whirlpool. Disappearing in one place, he pops up in another for a moment, then is lost to sight again for a long underwater stretch, only to surface like a diver at the other side of the street. He has been seen to emerge with three buttons missing, a uniform torn, hands 'singed', military cap bent, but eyes sparkling with pleasure."

Humour

His humour is as out-of-the-way as everything else about him. When Soustelle told him that all his (Soustelle's) friends in Algeria were horrified by De Gaulle's policy of negotiating with the Nationalists, he blandly remarked: "Alors, mon vieux, changez vos amis". On another occasion, when Frey, the Minister of the Interior, remarked that if they held elections the OAS might manage to assassinate at least 50 Gaullist Deputies, De Gaulle fell into a reverie, then murmured with a sigh: "Qu'importe, Frey! Pourvu qu'ils sont bien choisis!" I like the French word "choisir" which means to choose. The equivalent in English is so stupendous as to be almost sublime.

How will history regard him? It all depends on how things turn out. In retrospect it may well seem that he seemed so tall only because he was matched with pygmies; that he spoke so true only because it was against such a torrent of lies and fantasies; that his dawn proved to be sunset, spectacular, certainly, but at best a meteoric flash in the night sky. The egotism implied in such eulogies is so stupendous as to be almost sublime. The trade of the particle physicist is not nearly as remote and abstract as it seems at first sight. The scores of different particles that he knows are nature's inventions, not his. The weird laws and theories that he advances and tests may not be directly relevant to the everyday world, any more than are astronomers' studies of remote galaxies, but they are hopefully the ultimate governors of the world we inhabit.

Why is hydrogen the raw material of the universe? The current importance of this issue becomes plain when one recognises that given hydrogen and the well-known forces of nature, every thing else can already be explained—in principle, if not always in

Science

SUB-NUCLEAR CHESS

By Nigel Calder

TO share the iconoclastic excitement that contemporary physicists experience from their work is not made easy by the concepts involved, which make Einstein's relativity seem like "kids' stuff". But it is worth some effort because one of the great intellectual dramas of all time seems gradually to be approaching some sort of climax, using as props the big and costly proton-smashing machines at Brookhaven (Long Island) and CERN (Geneva).

Recently, after analysing nearly 500,000 photographs of sub-nuclear chaos produced by a beam from the Brookhaven machine, an Italian physicist, Paolo Franzini, and his American wife and colleagues announced a result as remarkable for the physicist as if he looked in his driving mirror and saw the car behind running upside down. In literal terms, the team had studied an obscure but important kind of particle of matter, the eta-meson. It has a very short life and decomposes into other particles, called pi-mesons, most of which carry an electric charge. But the eta-meson throws out positively charged pi-mesons more energetically than their negatively-charged counterparts; that is what the new experiment shows.

Eta-meson Affair

It simply should not happen that way, according to the physicists' deep-rooted belief that positive and negative charges are equal in status in nature. The ephemeral eta-meson, of which most people have never heard, has thus made

exact detail. The formation of stars, the building-up of other elements, the appearance of chemical compounds, of life itself—all these follow happily from the existence of hydrogen. But why hydrogen? Why, in other words, has nature produced a stable particle, the proton of measurable mass and universal characteristics, that serves as the nucleus of the hydrogen atom, together with a convenient light-weight particle of opposite charge, the electron, to join with it and neutralise it? Why not something three times heavier or five times smaller? Coincidentally, it is necessary to explain the existence of the other, ephemeral particles.

Laws of Nature

The answers are sought by asking very profound questions about the laws of nature. Experimentally it is done by smashing matter into smaller and smaller fragments using ever bigger machines; the Russians are completing a machine more than twice as energetic as the Brookhaven and CERN machines, while the European and American physicists now want machines 10 times as powerful. But the basic force is deployed with scientific subtlety of each kind, and expressed in such jargon, that it is hard for the outsider to understand why the physicists need their expensive apparatus and why the games they play with them are so important.

Games is the word, in no pejorative sense. Richard Feynman has compared the work of the physicist with someone trying to learn the rules of chess by watching games in progress. Just as he thinks he is understanding the basic move, something strange happens like casting a pawn or turning into a queen—possibilities essential to an understanding of the rules. The rules of nature, exposed in the games with the big machines, are only partly known. But they are rules of a beautiful kind, of the same universal profundity as the fact that the familiar space we inhabit has three dimensions, rather than two or four.

The physicist speaks of conservation laws, or symmetry laws; the two are virtually equivalent. He knows that energy and electric charge cannot be created or destroyed, whatever happens; he knows that there are other properties of particles, that are similarly conserved. This elegant symmetry enables him to classify the known particles in related groups so that, given a few kinds of particles, the existence of the rest follows from the rules of the game. The rules define, as it were, what particles can and cannot exist, so we are getting into our search for fundamental explanations.

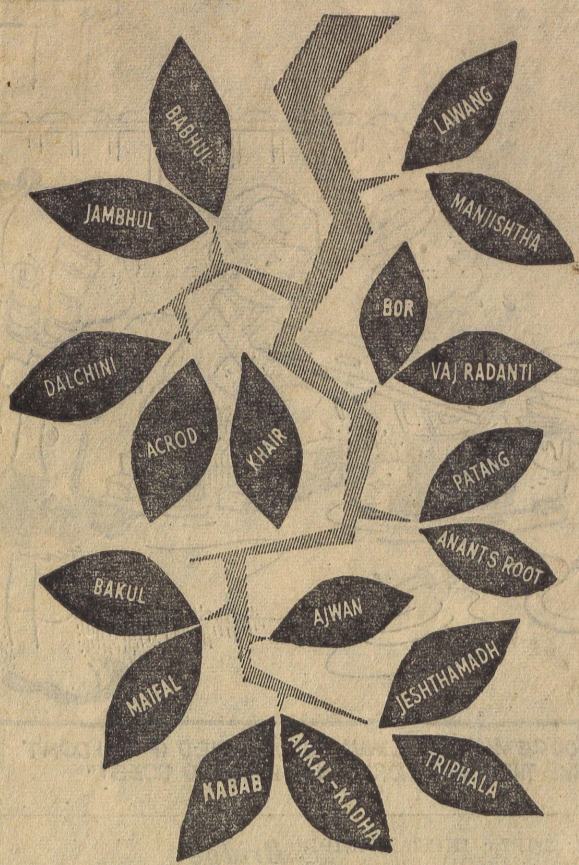
Nature's Preferences

But he also knows that, in certain cases, particularly when he is dealing with radio-active decay, nature may show a stunning disregard for these apparent rules—as if he suddenly sees a pawn taking a piece en passant. That happens, for example, with the *beta* particle, 10 years ago, when it turned out that nature shows mild preferences as between left and right. Later, it turned out that nature is not always ready to let relations reverse themselves with complete facility. And this month we have the curious charge asymmetry in the emissions of the eta-meson.

Just how long it will take to learn all the main rules and to make sense of them is hard to predict, but it should be within the lifetime of most of us. When it is accomplished, it will be the biggest thing in physics since Newton's discovery of the law of gravitation, and it will bring a century of physics to a splendid climax. And when we understand it, should all seem very simple, and the reason the universe is made of hydrogen may be plain enough to teach to schoolchildren. (Copyright, by arrangement with *New Statesman*).

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The Wonderful World of Marco Polo

By Manoj Das

"SAILING westwards for about sixty miles from Ceylon, one arrives in the great province of Maabar... You take it for a fact that it is the richest and the most splendid province in the world."

In the beginning of the fourteenth century when Marco Polo revealed in the above fashion the facts of the mysterious East, of Maabar (modern Tanjore), spoke for the first time to Europe of the existence of a civilised 'Ziangu' (Japan), and of Java, Burma, Laos and Siam, his intimate friends entreated him to revoke all his lies! "But I have not told half of what I saw!" was the pathetic reply of Marco Polo.

Ruskin complained that railway travelling was only like being sent away as a parcel. With revolution in all the spheres of communication, travelogues, unless they are about an exceptional region or are remarkable for reasons other than travels, have lost much of their thrill.

Brave Spirit of Quest

Matters, however, were quite different seven centuries ago. Above money or necessity or chance, what was needed to go into unknown horizons was a brave spirit of quest. Brothers Maffeo Polo and Nicolo Polo had this quality, which led them to Bukhara, where chance brought them upon Kubla Khan's envoys. Glory of the potentate lured the Venetians to the legendary Cathay (China). They were extravagantly entertained, and then were commissioned by the Khan to the Pope's court to procure a hundred evangelists. They could, however, procure only two, who too deserted them soon.

Yet, the Polos were now three in number, with Maffeo's young son Marco joining them. As they advanced, experience greeted them in abundance. They came across Bagdad, lately conquered by Tartars. The Tartar chief Hulagu, while exploring the city, discovered a secret tower of gold. He accused the Cathip for vulgarly accumulating wealth instead of spending the same to protect his city. "Eat your gold to your heart's content," said Hulagu, and left the fallen Caliph amid his gold and sealed the tower.

In Persia, they wandered through the region of the Old Man of the Mountain, terror personified. He had secretly built an enchanted palace with damsels dancing in and streamlets of wine flowing around it. He would ask any

eligible youth if the latter would like to experience paradise for a while. The youth naturally would be eager to do. The Old Man then would entertain the youth with a certain drink. That would make the youth swoon, and he would be carried into the palace to discover himself in due course in the very heart of paradise! After a couple of days of merry making there, he would be again treated with the drink and be brought back to the Old Man's presence. Then, the youth would only be too happy to place himself at the Old Man's service, so that a conspiracy to a palace would be eternally his attendants. Thus, the Old Man raised an undaunted army till his paradise was invaded by the Tartars.

The Polos also heard of a gang of strange plunderers who carried whirlwind with them. Actually, this gang had mastered the swiftness to gallop along with the whirlwind, the whirlwind went on its natural course. Thus rushing into villages and towns, burning and plundering, they created the impression that they had the amazing command over the course of the whirlwind.

How the Stories were Recorded

At last, when they stood in Venice, nobody recognised them. But they had brought with them wealth and wisdom, which soon secured to them high position among the Venetians. Yet, their stories would have died in a generation or two but for the occurrence of a battle between Geneva and Venice. The Venetians were defeated, and Marco was taken prisoner. Inside the prison, a writer named Rustichello took a faithful dictation of his accounts and rendered a permanent form to them. Marco Polo, of course, was released soon and led a respectable life again.

Marco Polo's book has been hailed by posterity as a landmark in the records of man's urge to unravel the unknown. Columbus possessed a copy of the book and made careful notes upon their pages. H. G. Wells writes, "The travels of Marco Polo is one of the great books of history. It opens this world of the thirteenth century to our imagination... It led directly to the discovery of America... The European literature, and especially the European romance of the fifteenth century, echoes with the names in Marco Polo's story, with Cathay and Cambaluc and the like."

To students of poetry, the accounts of Marco Polo will always prove a general aid in appreciating the atmosphere in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' with the mysterious "caverns measureless to man" and a "swiss sea".

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