

VIVE LA DIFFÉRENCE!



Why are British-French relations strained? Some say it's inevitable. But the security of Europe, and the well-being of such places as the New Hebrides, suffer from our division.

We are different. But our differences can either complement or divide. We can bring out the best or the worst in each other. And when the worst comes out, it might be worth looking at. It could show up truths about ourselves that, if faced, would equip us better to meet the challenges of our dangerous but exciting world.

Things can be different. Here French and British say what they feel:

A certain je ne sais quoi

by Gérard d'Hauteville

AT A DINNER at home recently, we were talking about Paris's traffic problems. An English friend, who has lived in France for more than 20 years, was telling how, in an interminable traffic jam, a car tried to pass him from the left. When he was not able to, the driver became furious and began shouting at him. 'I pulled down my window,' our friend related, 'and exclaimed, "Mais, Monsieur, c'est L'Entente Cordiale!" My good old English accent did the rest. The driver, stunned for a second, suddenly roared with laughter.'

I had to admit I felt ashamed, because I am often like that angry French driver. And I admired and envied our friend for that great British quality, phlegm—even more, grace.

No doubt in this, as in many other ways, we French are in dire need of change. But post-war Europe was born of change in people's deepest attitudes. Though the appearance may sometimes suggest otherwise, there is a spiritual essence in that Europe. Those who do not see it miss something important.

When we ordinary Frenchmen think of Europe, we don't think of butter, or wine, or beef, or even of mutton—although these things count. We think—it is not easy to express—we think of it as a family to which Britain belongs.

Yes—don't believe all that is said in our press or in yours. We would feel gravely sorry, terribly upset if Britain left the Common Market (oh, that poor word!).



A day will come when you, France, you Russia, you Italy, you England, you Germany, all you nations of the Continent, shall, without losing your distinctive qualities and your glorious individuality, blend in a higher unity and form a European fraternity, even as Normandy, Brittany, Burgundy, all the French provinces, blended into France....

VICTOR HUGO 1802-1885

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Surprise the dockers

by LAWSON WOOD who lived in France for eight years:

IRÈNE LAURE, the former Secretary-General of the Socialist Women of France, said to us recently, 'The most important relationship to work at now is that between Britain and France.' Since she was credited by both Adenauer and Schuman with having done more than any other person to reconcile France and Germany after the Second World War, we took this seriously.

We and the French approach things in diametrically different ways. They want to think out in advance all that is involved, and satisfy themselves that the course of action is logical. We prefer to say, 'Let's make a start and work it out as we go along.' Add to this pride on both sides, and there is ample fuel for the flames of disagreement. Hence the difficulties in planning any joint venture.

Long step

Last month, at a dinner in London, a French Member of Parliament spoke humbly about his country. 'We French have never come to terms with 1940,' he said, 'when we surrendered and you didn't; when you stood alone and then liberated us.' His warm tribute to Britain stirred a senior trade union official from Britain. 'Last night I was with a group of 60 dockers and they didn't have one good thing to say about the French. If they had heard you speak as you have done, they would want to be part of Europe.'

Both men agreed that bigger goals were needed. 'Husbands and wives quarrel till something goes wrong with the children,' said the union official. 'Together our countries are meant to be animators of the spiritual force needed to answer the world's problems,' the French MP responded.

Given big enough goals, the British and French could combine with a creativity that would surprise the world. Concorde is, in a small degree, an omen of such co-operation, made possible by the honest recognition and sinking of our differences.

It will need the change of heart which God gives to French and British alike when we decide to seek His way rather than the French or British way. It would be a long step towards putting unity into the Community.

Expanding market

PATRICK EVANS farms in Herefordshire. He is one of number of farmers from several European countries who are working together to implement new concepts in European agriculture:

FRENCH AGRICULTURE is so much the biggest in the Common Market that it derives by far the greatest value from the EEC's Common Agricultural Policy. There is nothing wrong in this, if a reasonably fair basis of competition can be arrived at. But the real basis of unity should be in the aims we share for the world, in which we can operate as colleagues rather than as competitors.

A veteran French farmer wrote in a personal letter to a British friend, 'Many French have the feeling, justified or not, that England accepted entry into the Common Market to get out of its industrial decline without abandoning the cheap food policy, and consequently lower wages, which her Commonwealth links give her. They reproach her for entering Europe with the Commonwealth. But I ask myself whether we don't need Europe to enter the Commonwealth. That is to say, to seek passionately, and by every means and at every opportunity, to unite round Europe all peoples of democratic tradition and Christian inspiration.'

That may not be the whole story, but what are the great tasks which Britain and France

might work together to fulfil?

First there is the developing world and the practical steps taken through the Lomé Convention between the EEC and 59 poorer countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Even critics of the Common Market accept the Lomé Convention as one of its positive achievements. Leaders from a number of the African countries taking part, have commented on the degree of teamwork which it has demanded of them to be able to present a common position during negotiations. It remains to begin similar work between Europe and Asia and Latin America.

Farmers and Politicians

Second there is the pressing question of Europe's relationship with the food exporting countries, particularly the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. These countries are key to ensuring that every man, woman and child in the world is properly fed. There are no insuperable technical problems. It is in the political and economic field that progress has become painfully slow. We need to seek much closer consultation in shaping future food policies.

It is the discipline of tackling world problems which should make the Common Market work. For too many it has been a club for economic growth. Such institutions are not popular when recession sets in. The projected enlargement of the Market to

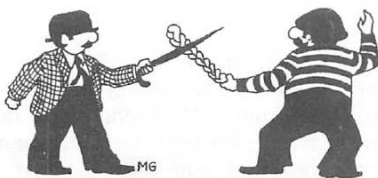


Patrick Evans

include Greece, Spain and Portugal is fraught with problems. But if it is successfully accomplished, it should provide valuable experience on the road ahead for poorer countries.

If all this seems a far cry from making the Common Market work, it is because we judge the success of the Market by our own affluence. On that basis it may truly become, as many predict, unworkable. Given a world aim, it might well take on a new lease of life. How to build trust might again appear a more practical policy than the construction of the mechanisms to prevent cheating. The realists may not be the cynics who prophesy disaster, but those with the faith to practise what they preach. Farmers often say that they can arrive at understandings with their opposite numbers quicker than the politicians. History is offering us the opportunity to rise up and prove it.

Marriage counselling



This editorial appeared recently in the French-language magazine 'Changer':

THE EUROPE OF THE NINE is going through difficulties, especially in their relations with Great Britain. But there is one factor that citizens of the continent, who criticise their partners across the Channel for not respecting the Community rules, easily overlook: Great Britain needs to rediscover her self-confidence.

She was the first to undergo the Industrial Revolution, and dominated the oceans for centuries. More recently, by her tenacity and patriotism, she saved Western democracy. But in recent years, she has found herself cut off from her empire and her world role, weak and impoverished compared with her continental neighbours.

De Gaulle is often misunderstood outside France. By his authority and vision for his country's destiny, he restored the picture of a nation sure of herself. In the same way, Mrs

Thatcher is trying to boost the morale of the British people. Abrasive, arrogant and indeed nationalistic in the eyes of her partners, her stand, and the flair with which she holds her ground, are welcomed at home.

On our side of the water, will we recognise that this is perhaps a necessary stage, and that it's better to have at one's side a Britain that, though difficult, is strong and reliable—as long as she bows to the golden rule of European unity, that of unanimity in a spirit of compromise?

A French politician said to me recently of Franco-British relations that they were like a good old-fashioned marriage: we have known each other for a good many years, we have our ups and downs, but we are sticking together.

So let us work, from all angles and at all levels, on our relationship with the British, as we have worked on our relations with Germany. Then, even if in the future the political structures of the present community evolve and are modified, the unity of Europe will not have been a vain ideal.

'Europe at the service of the Third World—that should be the new idea which alone can give our efforts meaning and creative value.'

André Philip (1902-1970)
French socialist leader

Syndicalistes' solidarity

DICK COSENS is Chairman of the Action Committee for European Aerospace:

THE EUROPEAN AIRBUS is today one of the most successful civil aircraft in the world, with orders and options for over 450 aircraft. But in 1966 the project was almost a dead duck, having been all but abandoned by the various European authorities concerned. It was, to a great extent, due to the fight of both workers and employers in the British and French aerospace industries that the airbus project got under way.

Then, in 1969, the British Government pulled out of the project. Once more, it was mainly due to the joint fight of English and French aerospace men that a collapse of the project was prevented. The French and German governments kept the project going, while Britain continued to build the wings as a private venture.

Two years ago the British government once again was trying to conclude negotiations for Britain to become a full partner in the European airbus consortium. At that time French trade unionists responded at once to appeals from English colleagues to use their influence to persuade the French officials that they should agree to full British partnership. Britain was accepted back as a full partner in January last year.

Not so different behind the façade

LAURIE VOGEL

MARRIED TO a Frenchwoman for 23 years, my conclusions on French-British relations differ from those of recent articles I have read in the British press. When I hesitantly proposed a life-partnership, Elsa did not say, 'I'll go it alone', but 'With all my heart'.

Politics, it is true, tend to enliven family rows. Our first real quarrel brought in France's action in Algeria and Britain's war against the EOKA independence fighters in Cyprus; it had started with me giving some well-meant advice on how Elsa should choose her dresses. But it illuminated for me how deep in me is the streak (so resented when it comes out as British imperialism around the world) of feeling I can tell others what should be done and how to do it. I could then humbly ask forgiveness. Elsa, for her part, had always assumed the French were better at clothes than the British; that attitude shut me out of a part of life and she apologised.

British sentimentality

It has been an exciting experience of learning respect for each other's approaches, values, and country. Eight years after our marriage, Elsa decided to take a British passport. This was primarily to avoid being separated in countries where visa regulations for French and English differed. But as a spontaneous decision—giving practical effect to our commitment to serve God together—it moved me deeply. It meant the recall of her documents as a French citizen.

Needless to say, it has not made her one whit less French! And in Latin America, where we spend most of our life, this has been our entrée, time after time, into difficult situations. For France is considered the second mother country by most of the 300 million Latin Americans.

Inevitably, I can't tell whether our totally different approaches are because we are French and British, or because men and women see fresh angles. But, through them, I have made some surprising discoveries; and since they contradict the newspaper articles, I set them down:

Tending the trees

by **Charles Danguy**
a Frenchman working in Brussels

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY is on the threshold of a new stage which will require as much courage, boldness and inspiration as did the stage that began 35 years ago.

How do we ensure that it does not become simply an edifice serving a privileged minority? An Asian ambassador asked

1. We need to take account of British sentimentality. It's very deep and attempts to control it can lead to sulking and moods. A great advance comes when a Britisher admits how deeply he feels on many issues, without thinking it's something to be ashamed of.

2. French logic, as far as our experience goes, is a myth. While I am plodding through a systematic analysis of a situation, drawing up a list of possible choices, Elsa has instinctively come to the right solution—and, frustratingly, can produce no arguments to support her choice other than she feels it's right.

3. We British harbour grudges. That may be one reason why the class war rages so fiercely in our country: men are taking revenge for what was done to their fathers and grandfathers. But, luckily, not all the world is British nor need it be treated as though the grudges of yesterday are kept today. I have been moved, more times than I can remember, to discover that, when I've finally come round to apologising for a hurt inflicted, Elsa has already forgotten it and moved on.

4. If we turn in on ourselves, our different approaches lead to explosions! If we don't, they give us an insight into the ways of other peoples. Together, we are ten times as effective as when trying to pursue different courses.

ELSA VOGEL

MANY FRENCH want a partnership with Britain. We are very conscious of what

'France is a country that lives by the statute book. For us the law, once written, is sacred. It can be altered only in the most solemn circumstances. Britain, on the other hand, is famous for its pragmatism. Its law is that of custom and usage, constantly adapting to new conditions.'

Couve de Murville,
former French Foreign Minister

me recently, 'Is Europe ready to open itself to the world?'

Present day Europe is the fruit of reconciliation between people, at every level in every country, brought about by far-sighted and courageous men.

The task was foreseen by Robert Schuman during the war. His meetings with Frank Buchman, initiator of MRA, encouraged him to undertake this work for the sake of a lasting peace. The Community is the delicate fruit of his and others' endeavours.

If we want to grow other fruits, we must now take the trouble to care for the trees.



Dr and Mrs Vogel

change the British will need. Here is where I think we French can be different.

1. In our love of talk purely for its own sake. The deepest truth for my life has come not after animated discussion but when I have taken enough time alone in silence with God.

2. In our belief that intelligence is the supreme human quality—and that we have more of it than others. A care for individuals that comes from the heart can be more valuable.

One day at the MRA centre in Brazil I was helping several workers' wives make a meal for the 30 participants in a conference there. Suddenly, an hour before lunch, 30 more arrived! I was angry inside. But my Brazilian friends rapidly switched the menu, and all sat down to the meal as welcome guests. That welcome taught more about a Christ-like society than a whole series of lectures.

3. In our individualism—the belief that everyone can get on with his life in his own way and to hell with any interference; and that France has that right in the family of nations.

Although my husband and I have different approaches to many subjects, our experience has been that all we have acquired from our different cultures is an asset. We can complement each other in whatever we undertake together.

I do not believe that a Common Market alone can inspire our nations to forge a common destiny. What we need are common goals. What goals? I believe that France and Britain need to accept the biggest challenge: that each decides to care for the future of the whole world.

On the level of feelings, we are always swayed by our emotions as French and British. What is needed is a decision of the will. It was not difficult for me, as I loved Laurie. But still there needed to be a decision to enter into the ways of the other nation, to enjoy them, to learn about them.

At the deepest level, you will discover that the French and the British are not different. Both usually have deep feelings which they try to hide: the French, with an intellectual front and slick repartee; the British by assuming a cool and composed manner. The moment you get behind these fronts, you have two human beings with the same hopes, fears, ambitions and longings. If husband and wife can find lasting bonds of love and friendship, why not our two nations?

Chord or discord?

by Tom Jones

ON ONE OCCASION, I took exception to a French friend's opinions about American policy in the Middle East. That was a year ago and events have proved the correctness of his analysis. However, I felt he was arrogant, and told him so. His response was to say that I never bothered to think seriously about such matters.

This exchange forced us to look at our attitudes. Through a combination of patience, a readiness to go to the root of what we felt about each other, a humbling of pride and genuine apology, we began to appreciate each other.

The French, I realised, through a turbulent history, have learnt to approach potential problems thoroughly and analytically, whereas we British, isolated on our island, with a superb and often misplaced self-confidence, wait for things to happen and then try doggedly to 'make do'. Each finds the approach of the other exasperating, yet there are virtues and faults on both sides.

France's experience of past invasion dictates a policy of studied accommodation and compromise. The French practised 'detente' with the Soviet Union long before that word came into Anglo-American usage. They also maintain an independent nuclear capability. The British and Americans think more in terms of geographical and military separation as means of security. We need each others' wisdom and experience if we are to secure the principles of freedom and democracy for the world.

France and Britain are two fascinating nations with an extraordinary breadth of experience, history and culture, and each clearly with a world role. And we are different. Yet our differences should be an asset, not a problem. The world quickly knows when, as often happens, we strike a chord rather than a discord.

Parlez-vous français?

by Alan Faunce

LAST YEAR I attended night classes to learn the French I should have learnt many years before—alas, it's not so easy at 50 as at 15.

Sensitivity to other peoples is not an English strong point. At Caux, MRA's Swiss centre, I spoke at a meeting conducted in French. But it never penetrated my Anglo-Saxon skull to speak in French—which with preparation I could have done.

To shift the mental laziness, the self-sufficiency and the pride of an Englishman like myself will take a miracle of God, no less. *Amis français—pardonnez-moi!*

Size of interests

by Claude Bourdin

Farm management consultant

BEFORE I personally got to know some British people, my attitude toward them was one of contemptuous indifference.

My interest in agriculture set me thinking about the difficulties between our countries. Having, by then, made some British friends, this prevented me slipping into the reaction of many French: 'The British are the problem'.

Furious in luxury, merciless in toil,
Terrible with strength that draws from her tireless soil;
Strictest judge of her own worth, gentlest of man's mind,
First to follow Truth and last to leave old Truths behind—
France, beloved of every soul that loves its fellow-kind!

RUDYARD KIPLING, 1913

An Englishman in Paris

by Peter Riddell

'IT'S THE HARDEST JOB to convince you British that we like you. It's just that when you act as if you still ruled...' This unfinished statement was cheerfully delivered by a French businessman who handles negotiations all over the world. I began to wonder if there was something in it after a minor incident at the washing-up machine, when I tried to lecture my French host on how to run the machine that he had been using for the previous ten years or so.

I enjoy living in France and feel very much at home there. I discovered that my name, spelt slightly differently, is a common name in Normandy, which helps when I am tempted to think, 'Oh, the British aren't like that'. Similarity, rather than difference, is the main impression I have of our two peoples. I have a sneaking suspicion that this may be at the root of the ambiguous attitude we have for each other. Pride bordering on arrogance, a sense of self-sufficiency, and independence, often make real contact difficult. We share the same civilisation, and many of the current problems have a depressingly familiar sense of *déjà vu* about them: unemployment, steel closures, class war, problems between the immigrant and host communities. Often we approach things differently, but they are the same things—from colonisation to the underground.

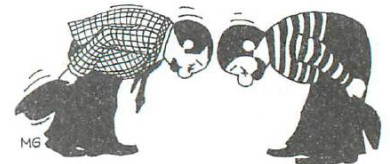
It has pained me to witness the strains between France and Britain these last months (I have been introducing myself as coming from 'Le pays de mouton et de la dame de fer'). The apparent lack of consideration by my countrymen for the interests of my hosts was the most difficult to accept. If the

This year I spent ten weeks in Britain. I saw how the sensitive feelings of the British came up against the French stone wall of self-assertiveness, a desire to be right, and national pride. I had to face these things in myself, as well as my indifference.

We could gain much from unity, since there are riches to discover on both sides—but unity is also a necessity. How can we make a positive and effective contribution to the world if we are continually quarrelling about our sectional interests? These are so small compared to the real needs of the world.

concept of a European Community is to mean anything, surely it means seeking to accommodate the needs of one's partners. Who is going to work for a community spirit?

The French and British ought to be working together. They are two countries who prize liberty above most other things. I believe that their post-colonial role is to encourage the growth of liberty across the globe. Some areas within our societies still do not enjoy equal liberty—we must struggle to extend it—but our imperfections should not prevent us from standing for it in the world.



Recently a guest came to our home to speak about the situation in her country. What she said conflicted sharply with my own experience and views and I rapidly became angry and completely closed to the lady. Later I realised that this had made me incapable of contributing constructively to the discussion. Also, by rejecting her views, I had deprived myself of a better understanding of the situation. I had made up my mind who was right and who was wrong, and would not admit any evidence which conflicted with that.

Quarrels between our countries, and decisions taken for short-term self-interest, drain the elements vital to liberty's survival. The ability which I seek—to remain open to those with whom I disagree—is needed between our two peoples, if we are to fulfil our role and not to be shaken every time sheep or apples hit the headlines.