The British and the Peace Conference

. . . as late as 1919 . . . the English still spoke of the Germans only as “the Huns” and demanded savage penalties for the guilty. For their opinions too had changed and now—less than a year later—they approved every decision which was likely to distress France and to be of help to Germany. —*Time Regained* 6: 136

Newspapers and public opinion

Charlus: The truth is that people see everything through the medium of their newspaper, and what else could they do, seeing that they are not personally acquainted with the men or the events under discussion? —*Time Regained* 6: 139

“What is astonishing,” he [Charlus] said, “is that this public which judges the men and events of the war solely from the newspapers, is persuaded that it forms its own opinions.” —*Time Regained* 6: 144

Proust and Gertrude Stein

Marcel’s observation about Bergotte’s manner of talking—the context is Morel’s imitations of Bergotte—reminds me of what Gertrude Stein told her “student” Ernest Hemingway: “Remarks aren’t literature.” Here’s Marcel’s comment: Not many people having known Bergotte as a talker, the tone of his voice was not recognized, since it differed from the style of his pen. This oral fertilization is so rare that I have thought it worth mentioning here. The flowers that it produces are, however, always sterile. —*Time Regained* 6: 113

Real people who appear in the novel

Proust occasionally tosses a friend a “bouquet” by referring to them directly in his novel. Here are some examples from this section. See my biography for more details
about Paul Morand, Sarah Bernhardt, and Viscount Bertrand de Fénelon and their relationships to Proust.

[Charlus is speaking] When Augustus of Poland, as we are told by the charming Morand, the delightful author of Clarisse, exchanged one of his regiments for a collection of Chinese porcelain, it is my opinion that he made a bad bargain. —Time Regained 6: 152

[Marcel is speaking] “You haven’t seen what Sarah Bernhardt said in the papers: ‘France will go on to the end. If necessary, the French will let themselves be killed to the last man.’”

“I do not doubt for a single moment that the French would bravely let themselves be killed to the last man,” said M. de Charlus, as if this were the simplest thing in the world and although he himself had not intention of doing anything whatsoever, hoping by this remark to correct the impression of pacifism which he gave when he forgot himself.

“That I do not doubt, but I ask myself to what extent Madame Sarah Bernhardt is qualified to speak in the name of France . . .” —Time Regained 6: 196-97

Marcel on Saint-Loup after his death. Although Bertrand de Fénelon is not mentioned here; we know from other sources that the incident of running on the backs of the seats in the restaurant was a gesture that Fénelon made for Proust. Jean Cocteau claimed to have been the inspiration for this. We remember that Fénelon was also the friend whose hat Proust demolished just as Marcel destroys Charlus’s in an earlier scene. Proust pays tribute to Fénelon directly elsewhere in the novel. This is said of Saint-Loup:

All this, the good as well as the bad, he had given without counting the cost, every day, as much on the last day when he advanced to attach a trench, out of generosity and because it was his habit to place at the service of others all that he possessed, as on that evening when he had run along the backs of the sets in the restaurant in order not to disturb me.

—Time Regained 6: 227

Here is the tribute paid to Fénelon earlier in the novel: having as my dearest friend the best, bravest, most intelligent of men, whom no one who knew him could forget:

Bertrand de Fénelon . . . —Sodom and Gomorrah 4: 231-32
Charlus: “I am less horrified at the disappearance of a unique monument like Rheims than at that of all the living entities which once made the smallest village in France instructive and charming.” —*Time Regained* 6: 151-52

The translation is not accurate here: “living entities” should be “groups of buildings.” Charlus means that the medieval village contains not only its central architectural building, the church, but also the other civic and private properties that made of the village an “instructive and charming” ensemble of its day.