(2) That part of what he would be asserting would be that there at present existed one and only one king of France.

I have already given some reasons for thinking that these two statements are incorrect. Now suppose some one were in fact to say to you with a perfectly serious air: "The king of France is wise". Would you say, "That's untrue"? I think it's quite certain that you wouldn't. But suppose he went on to ask you whether you thought that what he had just said was true, or was false; whether you agreed or disagreed with what he had just said. I think you would be inclined, with some hesitation, to say that you didn't do either; that the question of whether his statement was true or false simply didn't arise, because there was no such person as the king of France.1 You might, if he were obviously serious (had a dazed astray-in-the-centuries look), say something like: "I'm afraid you must be under a misapprehension. France is not a monarchy. There is no king of France." And this brings out the point that if a man seriously uttered the sentence, his uttering it would in some sense be evidence that he believed that there was a king of France. It would not be evidence for his believing this simply in the way in which a man's reaching for his raincoat is evidence for his believing that it is raining. But nor would it be evidence for his believing this in the way in which a man's saying, "It's raining" is evidence for his believing that it is raining. We might put it as follows. To say, "The king of France is wise" is, in some sense of "imply", to imply that there is a king of France. But this is a very special and odd sense of "imply". "Implies" in this sense is certainly not equivalent to "entails" (or "logically implies"). And this comes out from the fact that when, in response to his statement, we say (as we should) "There is no king of France", we should certainly not say we were contradicting the statement that the king of France is wise. We are certainly not saying that it's false. We are, rather, giving a reason for saying that the question of whether it's true or false simply doesn't arise.

And this is where the distinction I drew earlier can help us. The sentence, "The king of France is wise", is certainly significant; but this does not mean that any particular use of it is true or false. We use it truly or falsely when we use it to talk about some one; when, in using the expression, "The king of France", we are in fact mentioning some one. The fact that the sentence and the expression, respectively, are significant just is the fact that the sentence could be used, in certain circumstances, to

1 Since this article was written, there has appeared a clear statement of this point by Mr Geach in Analysis Vol. 10, No. 4, March, 1950.
say something true or false, that the expression could be used, in
certain circumstances to mention a particular person; and to
know their meaning is to know what sort of circumstances these
are. So when we utter the sentence without in fact mentioning
anybody by the use of the phrase, "The king of France," the
sentence doesn't cease to be significant: we simply fail to say
anything true or false because we simply fail to mention anybody
by this particular use of that perfectly significant phrase. It is,
if you like, a spurious use of the sentence, and a spurious use of the
expression; though we may (or may not) mistakenly think it a
genuine use.

And such spurious uses are very familiar. Sophisticated
romancing, sophisticated fiction,1 depend upon them. If I began,
"The king of France is wise," and went on, "and he lives in a golden
castle and has a hundred wives," and so on, a hearer would under-
stand me perfectly well, without supposing either that I was talking
about a particular person, or that I was making a false statement
to the effect that there existed such a person as my words des-
cribed. (It is worth adding that where the use of sentences and
expressions is overtly fictional, the sense of the word "about"
may change. As Moore said, it is perfectly natural and correct
to say that some of the statements in Pickwick Papers are about
Mr. Pickwick. But where the use of sentences and expressions
is not overtly fictional, this use of "about" seems less correct;
i.e. it would not in general be correct to say that a statement was
about Mr. X or the so-and-so, unless there were such a person or
thing. So it is where the romancing is in danger of being taken
seriously that we might answer the question, "Who is he talking
about?" with "He's not talking about anybody"; but, in
saying this, we are not saying that what he is saying is either
false or nonsense.)

Overtly fictional uses apart, however, I said just now that to use
such an expression as "The king of France" at the beginning of a
sentence was, in some sense of "imply", to imply that there was a
king of France. When a man uses such an expression, he does not
assert, nor does what he says entail, a uniquely existential pro-
position. But one of the conventional functions of the definite
article is to act as a signal that a unique reference is being made
—a signal, not a disguised assertion. When we begin a sentence
with "the such-and-such" the use of "the" shows, but does not
state, that we are, or intend to be, referring to one particular
individual of the species "such-and-such". Which particular
individual is a matter to be determined from context, time, place

1 The unsophisticated kind begins: "Once upon time there was..."
and any other features of the situation of utterance. Now, whenever a man uses any expression, the presumption is that he thinks he is using it correctly: so when he uses the expression, "the such-and-such", in a uniquely referring way, the presumption is that he thinks both that there is some individual of that species, and that the context of use will sufficiently determine which one he has in mind. To use the word "the" in this way is then to imply (in the relevant sense of "imply") that the existential conditions described by Russell are fulfilled. But to use "the" in this way is not to state that those conditions are fulfilled. If I begin a sentence with an expression of the form, "the so-and-so", and then am prevented from saying more, I have made no statement of any kind; but I may have succeeded in mentioning some one or something.

The uniquely existential assertion supposed by Russell to be part of any assertion in which a uniquely referring use is made of an expression of the form "the so-and-so" is, he observes, a compound of two assertions. To say that there is a $\phi$ is to say something compatible with there being several $\phi$s; to say there is not more than one $\phi$ is to say something compatible with there being none. To say there is one $\phi$ and one only is to compound these two assertions. I have so far been concerned mostly with the alleged assertion of existence and less with the alleged assertion of uniqueness. An example which throws the emphasis on to the latter will serve to bring out more clearly the sense of "implied" in which a uniquely existential assertion is implied, but not entailed, by the use of expressions in the uniquely referring way. Consider the sentence, "The table is covered with books". It is quite certain that in any normal use of this sentence, the expression "the table" would be used to make a unique reference, i.e. to refer to some one table. It is a quite strict use of the definite article, in the sense in which Russell talks on p. 30 of Principia Mathematica, of using the article "strictly, so as to imply uniqueness". On the same page Russell says that a phrase of the form "the so-and-so", used strictly, "will only have an application in the event of there being one so-and-so and no more". Now it is obviously quite false that the phrase "the table" in the sentence "the table is covered with books", used normally, will "only have an application in the event of there being one table and no more". It is indeed tautologically true that, in such a use, the phrase will have an application only in the event of there being one table and no more which is being referred to, and that it will be understood to have an application only in the event of there being one table and no more which it is understood as being used to refer to.