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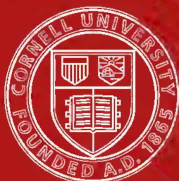

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THE LIFE OF
ERNEST RENAN

BY

MADAME JAMES DARMESTETER

(A. MARY F. ROBINSON)

SECOND EDITION

METHUEN & CO.

36 ESSEX STREET W.C.

LONDON

1898

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S.I.M

To

MADAME JEAN PSICHARI

(Noémi Renan)

I DEDICATE THIS PORTRAIT

OF HER FATHER,

WHICH OWES TO HER DEVOTED HAND

ITS MOST LIFE-LIKE

TOUCHES

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PART I

CHAPTER I

TRÉGUIER

ERNEST RENAN was born at Tréguier, in the Côtes du Nord, on the 28th of February 1823. For the third time in sixty years Brittany gave birth to a man-child who should transform and renew the religious temper of his times.

Chateaubriand and Lamennais were scarcely past their prime when the young Renan first went to school in Tréguier. In him, as in them, the racial strain is strong. Under the exuberance of Chateaubriand, the revolt of Lamennais, the sentiment and irony of Renan, we meet the same irregular genius, mobile and sensitive beyond the like of woman, yet, in the last resort, stubborn as Breton granite under its careless grace of flowers.

All these were great writers, but in their style, as in their intellectual quality, they have small share in that Latin order which is the birthright of a Bossuet, a Racine, or even a Voltaire. Their genius is a sort of hippogriff, as Renan used to say of himself, belonging to no known

race of mortal herds. Their style is a midsummer medley saved from incongruity by an infallible grace. Romance and Antiquity meet there, and the old world and the ultra-modern —the harp of Tristan and the echo of Paris. Celtic magicians, they see the world through a haze of their own, at once dim and dazzling, full of uncertain glimpses and brilliant mists, like the variable weather of their moors.

There are men of genius whose birthplace is of no moment. Who remembers that Shelley was born in Sussex? But Renan is as Breton as Merlin himself. Those who know nothing of Celtic places must find it hard to understand him. When I write: "Renan was born at Tréguier," I would desire that my readers should call up, not necessarily Tréguier, but the grey steepness of any large hill-town in Brittany, Scotland, Northumberland, Wales, Ireland, or Cornwall. Let them remember not only the gaunt and solitary aspect of the place, but the kind of persons who dwell in these small grey cities, at once so damp and so scantily foliaged, under the incessant droppings of the uncertain heaven. There is a great indifference to worldly things. And the dreamer—we may count him as ten per cent. of the population—be

he poet, saint, beggar, or merely drunkard—is capable of a pure detachment from material interests which no Buddhist sage could surpass. There is a vibrating "other worldliness" in the air; the gift of prayer is constant; religious eloquence the brightest privilege, and religious fervour a commonplace. Yet, all round, in the high places and the country holy-wells, Mab and Merlin, the fairies and the witches, keep their devotees. And over all the grey, veiled, melancholy distinction, which first strikes us as the note of such a place, there is the special poetic, Celtic quality, the almost immaterial beauty which has so lingering a charm. Many landscapes surely are lovelier than these weatherbeaten moors of wet heath and harsh gorse, of wild broom and juniper. Look at them, overhung by the wreathing hill-mists, traversed and seamed across by the deep-sunken river valleys which hide such unsuspected wealth of hanging woods. There is scarce a tree on the upper level—a stunted pine, perhaps here and there, or half-a-dozen lady-birches, mixed with thorn, clustered round some *menhir* by the yellow upland tarn. The keen sea wind has torn and twisted the scanty trees and blown their branches all one way. The purple heather barely hides the rock which pierces the sterile soil, as a bony arm frays a worn-out gar-

ment. The ocean, the melancholy ocean of a Celtic shore, bounds the horizon with its illimitable grey. The Breton coast near Tréguier is the softest, the prettiest, of these typical Celtic landscapes. But even there the country wears a barren grace. Yet what Norman pasture or Burgundy vineyard can boast the strong attraction of the moors?

The same quality — neither rich nor sound but infinitely sweet—clings about the people. The men in the fields gaze at you with stern dark faces in an almost animal placidity. In Renan's youth, they were still almost as wild as their country, strange rude men, with flowing hair, wrapped up in goatskins in wintertime. The girls are charming—it is difficult to say why—their slender and yet rough-hewn figures have no more grace of curve than a thirteenth century church saint in her niche. Their pale faces, with down-dropped lids and delicate pointed chins, have very little bloom. In their black dresses and white coifs they have the austere distinction, the demure reserve, of very young novices who renounce they know not what.

This Breton race, apparently so severe, is one of the most pleasure-loving, and one of the most garrulous in France: a very storehouse of myth and legend, of song and story, of jest and gibe.

These melancholy men and maids, visible emblems of renunciation, are capable of mirth and wit and passion. Fond of the glass, quick to repartee, they glory in the gift of the gab, but only when the door is shut on strangers. The extraordinary strength of idealism, the infinite delicacy of sentiment, which form the inmost quintessence of the Celt, impose on him an image of seemliness, a pure decorum, to which he incessantly conforms the old Adam rebellious in his heart. Reserve and passion, prudence and poetry, are equally inherent in him. The very sinner who trangressed most flagrantly at last week's wake or "Pardon," will show to-day in every act and every word a serene tranquillity, a justness of thought and phrase which is no more hypocritical than was the passionate fantasy of his falling-away.

Tréguier is an ancient cathedral city set high upon a hill at the confluence of two lovely rivers. A solitary place whose quiet streets are bordered with blank convent walls over which the garden tree-tops wave at intervals. The steep and silent city is crowned by a Gothic cathedral, an admirable structure whose simple lines soar upwards from a broad and massive base, ever slenderer, ever narrowing, till they terminate in a spire of extraordinary delicacy and loftiness, a land-mark

for many miles around. Beautiful cloisters, as old as the church itself, surround the grassy churchyard. But the glory of the cathedral is the large tomb of St Ives which it contains. The patron saint of Brittany, who is at once the patron of Truth and the patron of Rhetoric, is buried there.

Such is Tréguier on the hill. Two steep streets connect this "haunt of ancient peace" with the seaport of Tréguier, a busy place, yet opening quietly, not on the full sport and hurry of the ocean, but on a land-locked estuary folded between tranquil promontories wooded to the water's edge. Tréguier port traffics in fish and grain, and the trading population centres round the quay. But this stir of life is hushed as we mount the hill. Only a few retired sea-captains, a sprinkling of the local gentry, and the numerous clergy, find on that peaceful summit an undisturbed asylum.

In the first quarter of the present century, a certain Renan, of the fisher-clan of the Renans of Goelo, having made some money by his fishing-smack, bought and inhabited a pleasant house on the hill, near the cathedral and the desecrated Episcopal Palace. The house we speak of is a tall, narrow, irregular building, no two windows of a line, whose gable-casements command a pleasant view of hills and woods seen

across an abrupt hill-side flight of steep-pitched roofs.

"Captain" Renan (*i.e.*, captain of his fishing-smack) was a feckless, musing man, an obstinate dreamer, convinced of his gift for practical affairs. Yet a man of character, of a silent tenderness of sentiment, with a strain of melancholy even in his happiest affections. The name he bore was well known in Tréguier, for his father was one of the most ardent among the Republicans of the place. In those days, when Charles X. was on the throne, Republican opinions were out of fashion; but Charles X. had no less devoted subject than the elder Renan. He too was a sailor: it is the Bretons who chiefly man the navy of France. On the very morrow of the Coronation this obstinate old skipper walked down Tréguier High Street adorned by an immense tricoloured cockade.

"I should like to know who will snatch these colours from me!" cried he.

"No one, Skipper! No one!" answered the townsfolk of Tréguier, and taking him by the elbow, they led him home. For though party passion ran high in Tréguier—aye, even scaffold-high!—a general neighbourliness tempered prejudice; and men who had threatened each other's heads a short while back, showed a willingness to render each other any kindly service, while fully

aware that on the morrow the old political quarrel might break out afresh.

In one of these hours of truce, the son of this staunch old sailor, Captain Renan — a good Republican himself—had married the daughter of a respectable Lannion trader. She had been reared in the religion of the altar and the throne. Her mother's house had been, throughout the Terror, the devoted hiding-place of non-juring priests. But the brilliance and the success of post-revolutionary adventure had left Captain Renan's bride of a more modern way of thinking. She was a Philippist—an Orleanist, as we should say to-day :—a little lively gipsy of a woman, black as a prune from Agen, and with Gascon blood in her. She had ever a witty answer ready, and knew how to defend her opinions and bring the laugh on her side. Her sharp brilliance formed the strongest possible contrast to the dreamy melancholy of her gentle husband.

The Celt is not only religious and political, he is also innately superstitious. There were wonder-working saints and fairies, and wise-women in plenty, on all the moors round Tréguier. When Ernest Renan was born,—a seven months' child, —his anxious mother feared he could not live. Old Gude, the witch, took the babe's little shirt

and dipped it in a country holy-well. She came back radiant: "He will live after all!" she cried, "the two little arms stretched out, and you should have seen the whole garment swell and float: he means to live!" The fairies loved the child, declared old Gude, and had touched him with their wand before his birth.

Wise old dame, she saw from the first the strength and the charm of Ernest Renan; a sort of natural magic, a sort of immaterial grace. There was the fairies' kiss! Renan almost certainly exaggerated his debt to a Celtic ancestry. But this much at least he owed them: this, and that obstinate sweetness, that rare fidelity of his, which contrasted so strangely with the liveliest impressionability of the nerves. And some whilom bard, most surely, bequeathed him the peculiar music of his style, clear as the bell about the neck of Tristan's hound, which rang so sweet that whoso heard it forgot forthwith his cares and all his sorrow.

Seven hundred years ago the Celtic poets invented a new way of loving. They discovered a sentiment more vague, more tender, than any the Latins or the Germans knew, penetrating to the very source of tears, and at once an infinite aspiration, a mystery, an enigma, a caress. They discovered "l'amour courtois." Yesterday their

descendant, Ernest Renan, would fain have invented a new way of believing. . . . The "amour fine" of Launcelot has passed from our books into our hearts; we feel with a finer shade to-day because those Celtic harpers lived and sang. I dare not say that Renan has done as much for Faith—that he has transported it far from the perishable world of creeds and dogmas into the undying domain of a pure feeling. But, at least, the attempt was worthy of a Celt and an idealist.

CHAPTER II

HENRIETTE

WE have spoken of fairies. The true fairy—the guardian angel, rather—of Ernest Renan's youth was his only sister, Henriette. Henriette had already one brother, Alain, an excellent lad of fourteen, sober, just, and silent. She was twelve years old when Ernest was born, a little woman already, troubled about many things, dimly aware of the struggle for life and able to understand her mother's tears, as she watched her rock the baby on her knees, weeping passionately over this second son, so long desired, and now born, as it seemed, into a world of sordid misfortune. Already the head of the family, in his dreamy but obstinate unworldliness, had half ruined the little household. Henriette, who inherited her father's silent and tenacious character, bore him a child's absolute devotion. She adored him and understood his moody reserve, as ruin gathered closer. She loved the vivacious mother whom she so little resembled, and who showed

the plain child but scanty tenderness. Above all, she hugged to her inmost heart this new-born brother, as though she felt that for him, through him, and in him, she should attain to a completer existence than any she had dreamed of heretofore.

Henriette was neither quick nor brilliant. She was not at all pretty, in the usual sense of fresh country prettiness. We might say of her, as it was said of the Maid of Siena, "*speciositas naturaliter in ea non inerat excessive.*" Her delicate features were marred by a birthmark. But she had eyes of the sweetest, long, white beautiful hands, and even in childhood a bearing of modest distinction. A sort of innocent dignity was hers—a dove-like dignity made of mildness and quiet and reserve. Nothing of the poetic charm of her birth-place was lost upon the pensive child. The shadow of the convent walls, the stillness, broken at intervals by the clash of church bells, the distant moan of the sea, the half-understood Latin sentences which the good Sisters taught her in the psalter, all were things to be pondered in her heart,—subtle influences to mould her tender nature. Her education, if limited, was exquisite. As she grew out of childhood, the noble families of Tréguier, banished by the Revolution, crept back, one by one,

fatigued and penniless, to wither in their ruined homesteads. Many single ladies of the most authentic nobility, were glad to earn their bread by giving lessons—a praiseworthy habit they had contracted during the Emigration. One of these impoverished damsels completed the training of Henriette Renan, and added to her natural sweetness that touch of good breeding which enhances every grace. Henriette, sensitive to every refinement, quickly caught the trick of unspoken and apparently deferent authority. While she was still a mere child, she was in great request as a tamer of wild spirits, and the young madcaps of the place yielded to her tranquil charm. She was born to guide, to soothe, and to educate. And when she was twelve years old she began the education of Ernest Renan.

"She attached herself to me with the whole strength of her tender and timid heart, athirst for love. I still remember my baby tyrannies; she never chafed at them. Dressed to go out to some girlish party, she would come to kiss me good-bye, and I would cling to her frock, beseech her to turn back, not to leave me! And she would turn round, take off her best gown and sit at home with me. One day, half in fun, half as a penalty for some childish offence, she threatened

to die if I would not be good, and thereupon she leaned back in her arm-chair, closed her eyes and made believe to be dead. I have never felt anything so vivid as the pang of terror with which I saw my dear one, immovable, absent—for our destiny did not permit that I should watch her last moments. Wild with grief I sprang at her and bit my teeth in her arm. I can still hear her scream! But I could only say, in answer to all reproaches; 'Why did you die? Oh, will you ever die again?'"[1]

When Ernest Renan was five years old and his sister just turned seventeen, their father's ship came into Tréguier port without a skipper. None has solved the mystery of the end of Captain Renan. Did the sea wash him overboard? Did he seek in suicide the bitter remedy for his troubles? His body was washed ashore off the sandy coast of Erqui. He died in debt. Not mere anxiety, but real poverty, was henceforth the portion of his little household.

Everyone at Tréguier knew and respected the Renans. The widow was left undisturbed in her little home; her creditors were confident she would pay off, little by little, her heavy inheritance. But it is difficult for an inexperienced woman to earn, for the mother of three children

[1] "Ma Sœur Henriette," p. 13.

to save. I suppose they had some thoughts of letting the little Tréguier home, for after the unhappy skipper's death, when Alain left to make his way in Paris, Madame Renan, Henriette, and Ernest removed to Lannion, where the widow had the support and comfort of her own family, respectable and well-to-do people of the trading class. Neither Henriette nor Ernest liked the change.

The country between the sea and Lannion is the very cradle of romance. On the sandy shore near Plestin, King Arthur fought the dragon ; at Kerdluel he held his court. Scarce a gun-shot from the coast there gleams the isle of Avalon. But in the most romantic neighbourhood, the life of a country town is essentially commonplace. The uncles and aunts of the little Renans had not much in common with Launcelot or Enid.

These small shop-keepers, in their trivial and difficult prosperity, these worthy Marthas troubled about many things, had little in common, either, with our two immature idealists. Henriette especially felt the transplantation. Her delicate and tender spirit seemed to soar ever upward, like the distant spire of Tréguier, further, further, from this too solid earth. Home-sick for Tréguier and heart-sick for her dead father, Henriette Renan

saw nothing in this world to tempt her from her wish to enter a convent. Ernest was the confidant of her vocation, and their happiest moments were these winter evenings when they would slip away to church together, the tall sister walking briskly with little Ernest completely hidden under the ample folds of her Breton cloak. Which was the happier then? She, God in her heart, the child she loved at her knees? Or the little lad himself, delighted to move in this warm loving darkness, clinging to his sister's skirts, crunching under his feet the fresh, firm snow? Long afterwards, this would still be their relation, on the one side a tender guidance, on the other a confident and happy clinging; and, as long as she lived, the cloak of Henriette Renan comforted her brother in this frosty world.

It was Ernest, after all, who proved the chief obstacle to Henriette's vocation: Ernest's future and her father's memory. The poor child, with her delicate sense of honour, could not rest happy till those debts were paid. How was her mother to pay them? Or Alain, in his 'prentice years? It was all very well for the creditors to be patient: until the last sou was paid her father's name was that of a bankrupt. And then, Ernest!

One day Henriette noticed a certain careful awkwardness in the gait of her little brother,

always a slow and heavy child. Her attention discovered his timid endeavour to hide an unseemly rent in his baby garments. Poor child! Such a humble little effort to be decent in tatters, was too much for Henriette's vocation. From that moment the convent was done with. She burst into tears and vowed to devote herself henceforth to the welfare of this patient brother, who, with delicate instincts, seemed destined to cope unaided with the sordid struggle for existence.

From that moment, Henriette Renan was the head of the household. Young as she was, a mere girl, inexperienced, she resolved to get the better of ill-fortune. The resolve of a Breton is a very dogged thing. Like that stone which a Yorkshireman keeps seven years in his pocket before he turns it, and then seven years more before he flings it, the resolve of a Breton is a thing which can bide its time. None of the British Celts possess that union of a tenacious obstinacy with a very sweet and tranquil temper which is the strength of the Breton. To go on willing the same thing for years, quietly, without making yourself or other people unnecessarily miserable about it, is, it must be owned, a great secret. And if the Breton neither drank nor dreamed—if the Breton cared in the least for success—there would

be no pulling against him in the race. Henriette's early efforts were all unavailing. First she attempted the thing which lay to her hand: she went back to Tréguier with her mother and Ernest and tried to set up a school in their old home. Then in 1835, she started for Paris, as governess in an establishment for young ladies. Before leaving her dear Tréguier on this desolate adventure, she received an unexpectedly brilliant offer of marriage from a man, much her elder, who felt the charm and rare devotedness of this fragile creature. But a hint that he did not mean to espouse her relations alarmed the high-strung Henriette and sent her off at a tangent on her career of self-sacrifice. She felt, it seems, some inclination for the kind and wealthy neighbour who shared her tastes and who offered her a Breton home. But, her father's debts—but, Ernest's future! How could she forsake the two most helpless things in the world, the dead, and a child? She thought of them. As for the happiness of Mademoiselle Renan and her establishment in life, these were very secondary considerations. It was unfortunate, doubtless, that she was so morbidly timid, so afraid of strangers, so easily home-sick. She must try to overcome these failings. So she packed her trunk, pinned on her old green shawl, kissed a long

good-bye to all she loved on earth, and, with a last cruel wrench as she crossed the threshold, she took her place in the Paris coach and watched the spire of Tréguier till it faded to a smoke-line in the distance.

CHAPTER III

THE SEMINARY

MADAME RENAN was no less religious than her children. But she wore her religion with a difference. A bourgeoise of Lannion, with a quarter-strain of Gascon in her, she was less dreamy than the family she had married into: these Renans, obstinate, ruminating men—skippers like her husband and her father-in-law, or bards and vagabonds like Pierre, her brother-in-law. Madame Renan's faith was, naturally enough, a little different from her daughter's; less a perpetual elevation of the soul by thought and prayer than a convenient guide to life and death, cheerful on the whole, abundantly illustrated with all the most agreeable legends. She was an excellent churchwoman. She had brought up her eldest son to trade, but the dear desire of her heart was that her Benjamin—her last born gifted darling—should become a priest.

Ernest was not six years old when first his mother placed him under the protection of the saints. When the child's father had been brought

home and buried, she took the little lad by the hand and led him outside the town to the shrine of St Ives. St Ives is the greatest saint in Brittany—the advocate of all good Bretons in the heavenly courts. Madame Renan confided her fatherless son to the guardianship of the immortal lawyer. With what feelings since then, we may wonder, has St Ives surveyed the career of his ward and fellow-townsman? The point is nice; for St Ives, let us remember, is the patron saint of truth. *Saint Yves de la Vérité* may pardon some heretical shortcomings to one who chose for his epitaph *Veritatem dilexi*.

In 1829 Ernest Renan was six years old. The child must be taught to read and write, and must learn his prayers in Latin. Who so fit as the priests of the seminary to educate the ward and pupil of St Ives? When, shortly after 1830, the Renans returned from Lannion to Tréguier, in order for Henriette to prosecute her scheme of school keeping, Ernest was placed under the care of the priests. There is an excellent seminary at Tréguier: Renan never ceased to commend the virtue, the simplicity, the kindness, the intellectual integrity of his earliest pastors and masters. These ecclesiastics taught him mathematics and Latin; they taught him little else. The notes of the teachers of Ernest Renan are still in the posses-

sion of his family. They are excellent notes; docile, patient, diligent, thorough, are adjectives which recur. We read, however, that "Ernest Renan is sometimes inattentive during service in church."

Renan never ceased to extol the education given him by the priests. "They taught me the love of truth, the respect for reason, the earnestness of life. And these are the one thing in which I have never varied. I left their hands with a soul so tried and fashioned by them that the light arts of Paris could only gild the jewel: they could not change it. I believe no longer that the Christian dogma is the supernatural epitome of the sum of human knowledge: but I do believe, I do still believe, that our existence is the most frivolous of things, unless we conceive it as a grand and perpetual duty. Old and dear masters, nearly all of you dead to-day, whose image often visits my dreams—not as a reproach, but as a mild and charming memory, I have not been as unfaithful to you as you think! At heart I am still your disciple."

Twice a day, regular as clockwork, Ernest Renan might have been seen walking slowly up the steep High Street to the college. The years went by, the child of eight or nine became a lad of fourteen, but the mien never altered, nor

the slow, sober gait, already a little rheumatic, nor the amiable unremarking gaze lost in some pleasant dream. Be sure that he took never a glance nor a step more than was needful ; for this child, so curious in all matters moral or intellectual, was the least observant of mortals. Renan was a gifted rather than a clever lad, more meditative than brilliant, honest and profound rather than quick or versatile. His lighter gifts and graces came to him when youth was over. A certain heaviness and slowness, always characteristic of his appearance, appeared as yet to cling round his intrinsic genius, like the protecting envelope about the unripe burgeon. Laborious, conscientious, eager to please, he was not only the gifted but the good boy of the college.

No child was more studious, more docile, more easily contented. When the day's task was done, no game, no long walk, no birds-nesting or blackberrying excursion tempted this odd schoolboy, always difficult to stir and averse to movement. He would take his book and sit in the inglenook on winter afternoons, or in the summer he would saunter round the cloister and watch the one old cow tethered amid the thick grass of the tombs. Life was full of interesting things. His mother's narrow house contained treasures of amusement. The child knew how to make a

great deal of happiness out of little things. He had brought back from Lannion wonderful archives of old bills found in his grandmother's garret: the quaint Gothic letterings of the headings filled his baby-soul already with the true historian's feeling for the Past. "There has been a deal of love spent on these," he used to say. Then there were long political discussions with Marie-Jeanne, the little maid-of-all-work; interminable musings over an odd volume of the "Cantiques de Marseille"; best of all there were the vast histories, the complicated and intricate Breton souvenirs and legends which would fall, hour after hour, from the lips of "Maman" as she sat busy with her sewing or her knitting. Belovéd "Maman," gayest and happiest of women, from whom the child inherited his temper of serene contentment, I think she taught him more, with her fund of myths and legends, than the good fathers up at the college, with all their Latin! For here, in the peaceful house-place, the future historian of religions learned, as unconsciously as a child learns his mother's tongue, how the unknown becomes the supernatural in a rustic imagination, and how, in another wise, a fact becomes a faith.

He learned other lessons which were to shape his life no less. Every influence taught him the duty of honour, the value of disinterestedness.

These qualities were not merely elemental virtues, but the privilege of a superior intelligence. All the boys at Tréguier College who showed an unusual aptitude were destined to the priesthood, unless they happened to be nobles, born thereby to certain other superior duties of their own, based on the same foundation of honourable disinterestedness. Commerce, money-getting, un-inherited wealth, were the pursuits and the compensations of men who had failed in their studies. Had they been quicker at their Latin grammar, they would certainly have chosen to be priests. For the self-made man was an inferior creature, half-educated, fond of gain, fond of his own opinion, harsh to the defenceless, pushing, and frequently discourteous; doubtless useful enough in his proper sphere, infinitely below that of the priest or the noble. The man who seriously respects himself must give his best labours to an ideal cause, far removed from his own desires and necessities, wholly unconnected with his personal profit. No other life can be beneficent or noble. . . . Such was the conviction formed in child-hood which was to guide Ernest Renan throughout his life. But in childhood he translated this idea into the limited vocabulary of his age. He looked round him: the most disinterested, virtuous and studious persons of

his acquaintance were the priests at the Tréguier Seminary.

His mother was enchanted, the good priests smiled acquiescence, when this unpractical, delicate, sedentary lad, who was always first in the class-room and last in the play-ground, said, "I mean to be a priest!" Of course Ernest Renan meant to be a priest: and, later on, Professor at Tréguier, and, later still, perhaps, Canon of St Brieux. He would become the worthy emulator of his teachers; and, since he loved books, —who knows?—he might compile or edit some history in the style of Rollin. "Maman" would live with him always, and keep his house, and mend his cassock while she told him stories.

Man proposes. . . . In the summer of 1838 Ernest Renan carried off all the prizes at Tréguier College. We can imagine the joy of Henriette, withering and paling up in Paris from sheer hard work and home-sickness. All her heart was in her dear child. The news of his triumph flushed her and expanded her, and renewed her youth. The silent and reserved young governess could not keep *this* wonderful piece of news to herself. Her prophetic heart foretold great things for Ernest! The doctor of the school where she taught was among the confidants of her discreet and tender enthusiasm, and

the good man, touched by the unwonted fire of this quiet creature, interested also in her Breton Phœnix, spoke to some of his friends about the marvellous boy of Trèguier.

Among others he spoke to Monsieur Dupanloup, an elegant and brilliant—nay, the most elegant and the most brilliant — Parisian ecclesiastic. At that moment Monsieur Dupanloup was superior of a Parisian seminary which he had founded in order to give educational advantages, of an altogether exceptional kind, to young nobles and theological students. St Nicholas du Chardonnet was meant to be a hot-bed of Catholic fervour and Catholic genius. Success, brilliance, talent, were among the evangelical virtues specially cultivated there. In the eyes of Monsieur Dupanloup the glory of God, the mysterious Shechina, was a very visible and glittering light of a somewhat superficial radiance. This Parisian recruiter of Catholic genius was quite aware that good things might come out of Brittany. . . . Chateaubriand . . . Lamennais . . . When he heard of the Phœnix of Tréguier, "Send him to me at once!" he decreed.

Renan was fifteen and a half.

"I was spending the holidays wtth a friend near Tréguier. On the afternoon of the 4th of

September a messenger came to fetch me in great haste. I remember it all as if it were yesterday! We had a walk of about five miles through the country fields, then, as we came in sight of Tréguier, the pious cadence of the Angelus, pealing in response from parish tower to parish tower, fell through the evening air with an inexpressible calm and melancholy. It was an image of the life I was about to quit for ever.

"On the morrow I left for Paris. All that I saw there was as strange to me as I had been suddenly projected into the wilds of Tahiti or Timbuctoo." [1]

In Paris, at the seminary of St Nicholas du Chardonnet, the Phœnix of Tréguier appeared but an awkward youth. Pale, sickly, ungainly, his stooping shoulders crowned by a head disproportionately large, the unprepossessing lad was as dull in manner as plain of face. He went musing all alone, brooding ever in a solitary reverie, his fine eyes seldom lifted from the ground, his subtle, humorous, delicate smile extinguished in utter homesickness.

Every now and then Henriette, in her old green shawl that spoke of Tréguier, would call to see him in the parlour. And the rest of the time the unhappy boy struggled and stifled in the Slough

[1] "Souvenirs d'enfance et de Jeunesse," p. 171.

of Despond, where the foot sinks hourly deeper, whence the soul, past hope, desires no escape. The professors at the seminary must have been sorely disappointed in their Breton prodigy. But, one morning, the priest appointed to read the letters written by the pupils to their parents, was struck by the profound, the yearning tenderness and heartbreak of Ernest Renan's outpouring to his mother. He set the letter apart and showed it, in some surprise, to the director, Monsieur Dupanloup. That evening contained the weekly hour appointed to read out, in presence of Monsieur, the list of the places taken by the boys in their different forms. Renan was fifth or sixth in composition.

"Ah!" cried the director, "had the theme been the subject of a letter I read this morning, Ernest Renan would have been first!"

From that hour he followed the lad in his studies, guided, supported, bewildered, enchanted him, and made the new interest of his life. Ernest Renan was not to die of nostalgia, after all. But something died in him all the same. "The Breton died in me!" he used to say. The transition had been too brusque for his honest heart, for his solid and logical mind. What was there in common between the archaic faith of the Tréguier priests and this brilliant, decorative,

literary and quasi-scientific Catholicism of Paris? Nothing which seemed important in the eyes of Monsieur Dupanloup appeared supremely needful to those Breton saints. How could the same august and sacred name shelter two incompatible spirits? If the one were true, the other must be false. If the one were false, the other might be false. If both were true, then Truth was no longer a thing one, simple and sole, but complex, infinite, susceptible of variation. These were the thoughts which darkened the mind of the young seminarist. He repulsed them as temptations, and redoubled his religious practices.

"He was," writes the Abbé Cognat, "one of the most devout of us in his pious reserve: chorister, writer of hymns, dignitary of the Brotherhood of Mary. Nor was he without a touch of superstition in his piety: never, for instance, did he forget to introduce a cross in the flourish which terminated his signature." [1]

If the Breton died at St Nicholas du Chardonnet —and I, for one, stoutly deny that he died—"the Gascon in me," wrote M. Renan much later, "saw abundant reasons to live."

The atmosphere of St Nicholas was no longer the still and humid air of Tréguier cloister. The breath of the boulevards penetrated through

[1] Abbé Cognat: M. Renan. Hier et Aujourdhui.

a thousand fissures into the closed circle of the seminary. Rollin was no longer the ideal man of letters, for the students discussed with passion Michelet, Lamartine, Victor Hugo, those rising glories of the hour.

"I discovered that there was a contemporary literature. I learned with stupor that knowledge was not a privilege of the Church. My masters at Tréguier had been far more advanced in Latin and mathematics than my new professors. But they dwelt sealed in a catacomb underground. Here, in Paris, the air of the outer world circulated freely. New ideas dawned upon me. I awoke to the meaning of the words, talent, fame celebrity. A new ideal swam into my ken. This, perhaps, was what I had longed for so vainly, so vaguely, in the dim cathedral aisles of Tréguier!"[1]

[1] "Souvenirs," p. 185.

CHAPTER IV

A DOUBTFUL VOCATION

LIFE, which already had set a dozen fatal questions to germinate in Ernest Renan's mind, had shaken the very foundations of the faith of Henriette. Already at Lannion, on the very morrow of her vocation resisted, she had begun to doubt of the truth of Christianity—a strange thing when one thinks of the girl's age and her environment. Unhappy as a governess, she no longer desired to be a nun. The Paradise of her old dreams appeared to her as a poor piece of man's work, a projection of the human fancy; and the adorable Mary, the hierarchies of saints, nay even the Good Shepherd, in whom she had believed, seemed so many sacred and pitiful ghosts. But out of the ashes of this old faith, reverently lifted on to the high places of the soul, there leapt a brighter flame, a new religion, imprecise, without text or dogma, and almost wholly moral: a belief in the vast order of the universe, speeding through cycles of time towards some Divine intent, and furthered in its grand and

gracious plan by every private act of mercy or renouncement, by all the tendency of effort which makes for righteousness.

Thus believing, however reverent towards the faith which had nurtured and prepared her soul, Henriette beheld with much misgiving her brother's progress towards the altar. How should a boy of fifteen appreciate the sacrifice demanded of him? The lips said: *abrenuntio!* but the child knew not what he renounced. Most sisters would have thought, first of all, that he cut himself off from love, but I believe Henriette's instinctive thought was that he cut himself off from liberty: that the child bound the man to think as the child,—that the child bound the man to obey as the child, and bound him into an intricate and inextricable fabric from which there could be no subsequent deliverance save at such a cost of good name, public respect, and ancient friendship as made her pale to think of. But Henriette was aware that the only fruitful change in spiritual matters, is that which begins within. Her meddling could do no good, only harm. The child might take his vows and keep them all his life long in perfect inner liberty, his heart remaining in accordance with his rule. She said nothing, therefore, only in silence vowed him her devoted sympathy if this should *not* be the case.

Half hoping, half fearing, lest he should outgrow the vocation so placidly accepted, she went week after week to see him in the parlour of St Nicholas, and let no word pass her lips that might hasten the issue.

But there came an end to these visits. Henriette found the struggle for life hard in Paris. Few were the savings she could send to Tréguier. When Count and Countess Andrew Zamoyski offered her a brilliant situation, amply paid, she accepted. She went out into exile in Poland, trebly far way in those days of post-chaise and travelling-coach—into a climate peculiarly unsuited to her fragile constitution—into a foreign country which, among its population, contained not one friendly face. Poor timid soul, the ten years of her engagement, the last ten years of her youth thus offered up in filial sacrifice, must have appeared in the prospect longer than all her past. Yet she set out, in 1840. Doubtless, when she bid good-bye to the dear young brother whom at their next meeting she should find a man, she did not dream that, from the vantage point of distance, she should become more familiarly his confidant, far more intimately his guide and true Egeria, than in the happiest days of their companionship. All that Jacqueline Pascal was to the great tormented soul of her

brother, Henriette was gradually to grow to Ernest Renan.

Some short while after Henriette's departure, Ernest Renan was promoted from the seminary of St Nicholas to the more advanced college of Issy, in the suburbs of Paris. There is no class of philosophy at St Nicholas. In the French University our fifth form corresponds to the class of rhetoric, our sixth or highest form to the class of philosophy, which is the direct portal to the Sorbonne, the Ecole Normale, or one of the various special schools of law, medicine, engineering, and the art of war. Something of this order is maintained in the seminaries. After the class of rhetoric, St Nicholas sends such of its pupils as are destined for Holy Orders to study philosophy in the great diocesan seminary of St Sulpice, which reserves for their accommodation its country house at Issy. Two years later, the seminarists are received into the vast establishment of the square St Sulpice at Paris, where they are initiated into the mysteries of theology.

Issy is an old French country house — a small suburban palace which belonged from 1606 to 1615 to Queen Margot of gallant memory. The worthy fathers have since added a few wings, a few aureoles, a blue mantle or so, to the

mythological personages on the walls, and nothing else has been altered in the pavilion of the Queen. The long, low house looks on to a park planted in the usual French fashion with clipped alleys of lime and hornbeam enclosing wide irregular lawns where the flowers spring and the hay grows and ripens as nature wills. Not only in hay-time, but right through the autumn and on sunny winter days, Ernest Renan might have been found, spending his hours of recreation on a stone bench under the leafless limes, wrapt in a great *houppelande* or French Inverness-cloak. There, impervious to cold and damp, he read his book, without a glance, without a word, for aught around him. Every now and then M. Pinault, the reverend professor of mathematics, would stop to gibe at him:

"O, the dear little treasure! Look at him, don't disturb him. Now, pray, don't disturb him. See how completely he has rolled himself in his form! *Mon Dieu!* he will always be like that! He will study!—study!—study! Poor sinful souls will appeal to him for help. He will go on studying. He will murmur: Leave me! Leave me! I am just at such an interesting point!"

Ernest Renan would look up at his tormentors, a little troubled by the acuteness of the shaft,

would heave a sigh, and would, in fact, go on studying.

Renan had entered Issy with a passion for Catholic scholasticism. The seriousness of his intelligence was satisfied by the vast and solid fabric of Catholic theology. Here was a subject more to his mind than Monsieur Dupanloup's course of rhetoric; more to his mind even than those first fevered readings of modern romantic literature, though these had left an ineffaceable impression on his talent. But now he had come to the heart of things. "I had left words for facts. I was about to examine the foundations, to analyse in all its details, this Christian religion which appeared to me the centre of all truth."

And hand in hand with the Catholic "philosophy of Lyons," Renan studied the Scotch metaphysicians. For some months Reid remained his ideal:—"My dream was the peaceable life of a laborious ecclesiastic—Reid or Malebranche—attached to his duties, relieved from his parish work on account of the value of his researches. Not until later did I perceive—with that degree of certainty which soon was to leave my mind no room for choice—the essential contradiction between these metaphysical studies and the Christian Religion."[1]

[1] "Souvenirs," p. 217.

After Reid came Malebranche, then Hegel, Kant, and Herder. From the first page, these more audacious and more universal thinkers exercised on Renan's mind an irresistible attraction. "I studied the Germans," he has written more than once, "and I thought I entered a Temple!" A temple, indeed, vaster than any church. . . . At the two remotest poles of human thought there are situate two opposite conceptions of the universe. Orthodox and traditional transcendentalism shows us a definite act of creation, a living God, a Providence which guides the world, and the infinite army of the immortal souls of men. At the furthest extremity of metaphysical science exists the mystical doctrine of immanence, which, in place of a definite creation, explains the universe by the gradual evolution of a germ. All Being is Becoming: an eternal process, an infinite continuance, over which an unconscious deity broods in the abyss. The universe is animated by one single Soul, in whom all living beings share, but of which, so to speak, they only enjoy the usufruct, since they fade and vanish like sparks that fly upwards, while It remains eternal. Of these two creeds, Renan was bound in honour to believe the first. Little by little, he inclined towards the second.

The retentive and tenacious mind of Renan

let nothing slip of these early readings. All his philosophy is there in germ. The mystical pantheism of Herder, the Hegelian idea of development, supplied him with the theory of evolution—of a world perpetually in travail of a superior transformation. Kant renewed for him the impelling principle of Duty. And Renan's theology is contained in a phrase of Malebranche's—*Dieu n'agit pas par des volontés particulières:* God does not act by special providences.

"I greatly like your German thinkers (he wrote to his sister in September 1842), though they be somewhat pantheist and sceptic. . . . One's first impression of philosophy is that it tends towards a universal scepticism. One is struck by the uncertainty of human knowledge, the slight foundation for all opinions save those based on reason. What we had always taken for Truth appears mere prejudice and error. . . . Philosophy excites, and only half satisfies the appetite for Truth. I am eager for mathematics!"[1]

Nothing could be more characteristic of Renan's peculiar intellectual constitution than the manner in which this very appetite for proof served to restrain his scepticism. He appears to have decided,

[1] Ernest et Henriette Renan: "Lettres intimes," pp. 88, 96, 97.

almost immediately, that the pure toil of the human intellect in the void could produce no solution of the eternal problem. He demanded, not a system, but a proof; and while continuing to read Kant and Herder, and especially Malebranche, he devoted no less a part of his time and strength to the pursuit of mathematics and natural science. "Who shall criticise the Eternal without knowledge?" he cried with Job. . . . By a sort of instinct which had not yet found its right outlet, Ernest Renan sought in exact science an answer to the terrible problems which philosophy had set him, and which the approximative or historical sciences were at length to resolve.

In this state of suspense, voluntarily imposed, there were moments when Renan relinquished all his doubts with the great cry of Faust: *Gefühl ist alles!* His heart had never wavered an instant in its absolute attachment to the Catholic Church. If faith be a sentiment, if we know God only by the heart, then Renan was a Christian. No life to him appeared so beautiful, so desirable, so true to the highest ideal, as the life of a priest. "Even if Christianity be only a dream," he writes to his sister in September 1842, "Even if Christianity be only a dream, the priesthood remains a divine type." Your true vocation is revealed by a certain inaptitude for

any other career. Renan, with his passionate love of study, his taste for seclusion, his complete incapacity for practical affairs,—Renan, with his vague and lofty aspirations towards the infinite, seemed born to be a priest. From Issy, in 1843, he wrote to Henriette:—"In fact I am only fit for *one* sort of life—a life of study and reflection, retired and tranquil. All the ordinary occupations of mankind appear insipid to me; their duties taste flat against my palate and their pleasures are a weariness. The motives that guide them are odious to me. It is clear that I am not born for a life of action.

"A private life would be my happiness. But that a man should live merely to himself taints his retirement with egoism. Even if it were possible that I should live so, and not be a burden on those I love! The priestly life offers all I desire without any compensating disadvantage. The priest lives for his fellows: he is their repository of wisdom and good counsel. He is a man of study and much meditation, and, at the same time, a brother unto his brethren. And this is in my eyes the ideal life.

"I am deep in philosophy and physics—deep in Malebranche, the finest dreamer, the most implacable logician who ever existed. Yet he was a priest. More than that; he was a monk.

And he lived unmolested in an age when Rome was jealous of her powers. See how man, by the mere impetus of his own weight, is constantly carried up the steeps of Hope!"[1]

But for Henriette, vehement and tender, he would, no doubt, have given way. She, with her piercing insight, her wide prescient outlook, her innate incapacity for compromise in a case of conscience, was for ever exhorting him, enjoining, remonstrating. More than once his heart fails: "Ah, Henriette, I am weak!" She will have no mercy! She sees, she feels, all that is fatally ignoble, hypocritical, and arid in the life, and at last, in the mind even, of the unbelieving priest. That vocation which Ernest beheld on its ideal side only, she saw in all the formidable consequences of its limitless subordination. Can an ecclesiastic dispose of his own soul? Is he not subject, even in spiritual things, to the direction of his superiors? Should he see the better part, is he always free to chose it? Is he not bound to follow in a track made to suit the common herd? Must not the tyranny of custom and number drag down to the level of the majority the rare devotees of an ideal duty? Anxiously, eagerly, she entreats her brother to assume no bond too soon, to wait until he be of man's estate before he take upon himself

[1] "Lettres intimes," p. 118.

the vows and service of a man. "Above all, do not think of us—of our family well-being! There is no true claim there. I can suffice!" She proposes to him other prospects. As a professor or as a public schoolmaster he might live the life of study he desires, and be useful to his fellows—and yet be free! She promises to find some sure solution—not, no doubt, the ideal of his dream. "But that ideal does not exist, I fear, upon our work-a-day earth. Life is a struggle. Life is hard and painful. Yet, let us not lose courage. If the road be steep we have within us a great strength; we shall surmount our stumbling-blocks! It is enough if we possess our conscience in rectitude, if our aim be noble, our will firm and constant. Let happen what may, on that foundation we can build up our lives."

Meanwhile, at Issy, other influences, no less determined, no less sincere, were concentrated upon the unstable soul of Renan. In June 1843, Renan, towards the end of his course at Issy, was informed that he was among the chosen few admitted to the tonsure. The young man implored a delay, immediately granted: "But keep this affair," said his director, "separate from the question of your vocation. They are distinct, and you know my opinion as to the second."

"And would you believe," writes Renan in-

genuously to his sister, "that I too am now much more assured of my vocation. All my directors are convinced of it. . . . As for the question of intellectual liberty, I have answered myself: there are two sorts of independence; the one presumptuous and bold, railing at all that is respectable, — this is indeed denied me by priestly duty: but in any case, my conscience and my desire for truth would forbid me such audacities; of this sort of independence, there can, therefore, be no question. There is, however, an independence of another fashion, wise, sage, respecting what is worthy of respect, despising neither beliefs nor persons, examining all things calmly, in good faith, using reason as a divine gift, and neither accepting nor rejecting any conclusion on the mere sanction of a human authority. Such independence is open to all men, and why not to a priest? It is true that in the case of a priest this liberty is subject to a certain restriction from which other men are free. The priest must know when to be silent! He must place a guard upon his lips. He must not scandalize the weaker brethren; for their name is legion who take umbrage at that which they can not comprehend. But, after all, is it so hard to keep one's mind to oneself in solitude? It is often a secret movement of vanity which

leads us to communicate our opinions. The law of silence ought, perchance, to be the chosen portion of the lover of peace. 'We must have a silent opinion at the back of our mind,' said Pascal, 'which is our secret standard in all things, while we speak the language understanded of the people.'"

CHAPTER V

A GREAT RESOLUTION

IN this frame of mind Renan left the seminary at Issy, and proceeded in due form to the great College of St Sulpice, in order to take his degree in theology prior to entering the Church. Here he began to study Hebrew. From the first he displayed a singular gift for semitic philology. And this appeared to simplify his career. It seemed so obvious that Renan was destined to be professor of Oriental languages in a Catholic seminary. But in reality, every month of study led him further and further from the Church. Here, in these questions of date, in this patient study of those inflections which serve to prove a date,—here was that certainty, that proof positive, for which he had so vainly craved in the throes of his doubts. Renan, by natural gift, was not a pure thinker, but a historian. The proofs of history were, in his eyes, the only authentic proofs. And these were all against the Church. No impartial philologist can maintain that the second part of Isaiah is due to the same hand as the first. The Book

of Daniel is clearly apocryphal. Who can suppose that the grammar or the history of the Pentateuch date from the period of Moses? Admit one error in a Revealed Text and you incriminate the whole. In another order of facts it is clear that many a dogma of the Church reposes on the erroneous translations of the Vulgate. The Church, like the Scriptures, was therefore fallible!

Meanwhile, St Sulpice laid the accent on philology, insisted on Renan's peculiar gift, and gave him every possible advantage. A special permission allowed him to follow M. Quatremère's course of Hebrew and Syro-Chaldaic tongues at the College of France. In 1844 he was intrusted with a preparatory class of Hebrew grammar at St Sulpice. At twenty-two years of age the young professor applied to the Semitic languages the system which Bopp had recently deduced from the comparison of the different Indo-European tongues. Renan's *General History of Semitic Languages* was to spring from this class at St Sulpice.

The young scholar tried to stifle his doubts, to apply himself relentlessly to exact studies, to pay the least possible attention to his religious convictions. A professor in a seminary would not need the living faith of the simple parish priest. Alas, his exact and

patient mind assimilated all the knowledge afforded him by the College of France, and by his masters at St Sulpice, and found therein new material for disbelief. But while his reason disengaged itself day by day from the authority of the Church, his heart found every day some new reason to be grateful. Rome has never disregarded the talents of her servitors. In our time she is especially tender to such of them as show a superior capacity for science: since at that outpost she is most frequently attacked. The directors of St Sulpice were not at all inclined to under-rate their pupil, they were ready to make almost any sacrifice in order to keep him where his talents were so greatly needed. They hoped also, doubtless, that science would prove a derivative, a happy counter-irritant, likely to allay the excess of German metaphysics—and this shows their sincerity: they could not suppose the truth upon the other side! Who can blame their zeal? They were not only wise and prudent, according to their generation; they were charitable with an eternal charity. Their work of faith and rescue was, to them, none the less a work of faith and rescue, because it was accomplished with an ulterior aim and an extraordinary diplomacy.

It was of no avail. Renan was honest, and at the other end of Europe there was Henriette

ceaselessly exhorting him to honesty. In his experience, science had confirmed the doubts aroused by speculation. He knew what was the essential minimum of Catholic belief: and he knew that he did not possess it. In this mood he returned to Tréguier in 1845, to spend the summer vacation with his mother.

"Ah, dear Henriette, the future fills me with fear. I, so weak, so inexperienced, so lonely, so unsupported,—with only you, five hundred leagues away, to help me—how am I to shatter bonds so mighty, and to wrench myself from a path whither a superior power has led me! I tremble when I think of it; but I shall not fail. And then—do you think I tear my faith out of my heart without a pang? Do you think I quit, without reluctance, these projects which for so many years have made up my life and my happiness? And all this world of mine, in which I was so at home, will cast me out for a renegade? And that other world—will it accept me? The first loved me, and made much of me: what does it not promise even to-day? Henriette, my good Henriette, keep me in heart! Oh, how sad and barren life appears to me in these moments! . . . Oh, my God, into what a snare hast Thou led my feet. I can only free myself by piercing my mother's heart. Oh, mother! Mother! I do

all I can to paint the future, to cheer her as best I may, to soothe her fears. . . . How often have I resolved to cast my doubts and scruples to the winds and go straight ahead! She is there, two paces away! God knows if I love and revere her: it is but a torture the more.[1]

. . . . . .

"Her endearments break my heart; her day dreams—which she is for ever repeating, and which I never find the cruel courage to gainsay—are a continual grief. Ah, if she only understood! I would sacrifice everything to make her happy—everything except my conscience and my duty. Ah, why was I not born a Protestant in Germany! Herder was a bishop, and he was barely a Christian. But in the Catholic Church there is no room for heresy.

. . . . . .

"My German philosophers are my resource. There I behold the continuation of Jesus Christ! What sweetness and what strength! Christ will come from the North at His Second Advent. . . .

"I still believe. I pray. I repeat the *Pater* with rapture. I love to be in church. Pure, simple, artless religion touches me profoundly in my lucid moments: then I feel the perfume of

[1] "Lettres intimes."

God. Yes, I am pious, fervidly pious, sometimes, in spite of all my doubts. I think I shall always remain pious in any case. Piety has surely a value of its own—be it merely subjective.

"Here they take me for a good little seminarist, very religious, very gentle. God forgive me, it is not my fault! How could I make them understand! I could never put so much German into the heads of my honest Bretons.

"There are moments when I think I will amputate my reason, and live only for the mystic life. Except my judgment, except the faculty which weighs and criticises, the Catholic Church responds to every function of my soul. I must therefore sacrifice either the Church or my judgment . . . a difficult and cruel operation, but God knows I would perform it if I could think it His will. Ah! how I dread the end of the vacation! When it comes to practice, what shall I decide?"[1]

This young Hamlet of the Inner Life was none the less a Breton, with a spring of resolve in him on which he did not count enough. More than once in his career the man who—in the phrase of Montaigne—was among all others "undulating and diverse," was to exhibit this same admirable obstinacy for conscience' sake. He left Tréguier

[1] Letters to the Abbé Cognat: "Souvenirs," p. 382 *et seq.*

on the 9th of October 1845, and returned to St Sulpice prepared to temporize and dally, far from certain of his future choice. A sort of innocent duplicity made the constraint of pious practices not entirely odious to him; a certain artless macchiavellism, which he never lost, made the difficult and mortal game he played rather interesting, than merely cruel, or repugnant. Moreover, the beauty of Catholicism satisfied his artistic instincts, his tender sensibility. And his education had fostered in him his natural optimism, so that he still sometimes envisaged, as quite practicable, heaven knows what chimaeric fusion between an inward sincerity and an outward observance of the Noble Lie. But his religious education had also fostered in him an extraordinary strength of conscience—backed at the last extremity, as we have said, by the Breton's doggedness.

It was evening when Renan arrived in the square of St Sulpice. A surprise awaited him. The directors, who had dallied and gone sauntering long enough, thought the moment had come for a brusque tightening of the rein, for a flying leap over the hedge. Renan found himself no longer a pupil of the seminary. During his absence he had been appointed professor in the Archbishop of Paris's new Carmelite College.

To accept was to give a pledge of good faith to the Church. To refuse so honourable a position was inexplicable. Renan sought his superiors, explained his whole position, his doubts, his scruples, which, instead of diminishing, increased with every month. Once at bay he stood firm, refused to temporize, and showed the obstinate grit in him. The Fathers immediately gave way; their bonds apparently fell from him. The same evening, without any sort of scene or storm, desperately alone, but not outcast, the young seminarist crossed the threshold of the seminary, traversed the square, and entered a small semi-clerical hotel at the north-western corner of it.

"A man of much talent said once of M. Renan:—

"'Renan thinks like a man, feels like a woman, and acts like a child.'"

"Did he act like a child, the poor young Breton who fled from St Sulpice aghast because he no longer thought the lessons of his masters all quite true? It was, perhaps, a piece of childish folly to renounce the splendid future which awaited him in his chosen path, to affront extreme poverty, without resources, without prospects, sustained by the sole impossibility of living for aught else than a conviction. Those

who think that the hall-mark of a man is his sincerity in regard to the world and his own soul, will grant that on that occasion the child showed himself twice a man."[1]

[1] James Darmesteter: Ernest Renan. "Critique et Politique," p. 63.

CHAPTER VI

DOMINUS PARS

PARIS, RUE DU POT-DE-FER
October 13*th*, 1845.

"AT last, my Henriette, my dearest friend, I can pour out all my heart, I can tell you all the trouble which corrodes my soul! The last few days count in the record of my life; perhaps they are the most decisive, certainly the most painful I have experienced. So many events have crossed each other in this narrow space that the mere recital of them will imply all my feelings. And it will console me to tell you everything, for here, now, my isolation is terrible, and my lonely, tired heart finds an infinite sweetness in resting upon yours.

"Only one word first, dear, of this last vacation; a sweet and cruel time for me. My position was of the strangest. To enjoy the companionship of my kind mother, to wait on her, caress her, cheer her by my day dreams, is so delightful a pastime to me that I believe there is no trouble, no anxiety,

that I could not forget in her society. And then, a peculiar indefinable sense of well-being hangs about my native place. All my childhood, so simple, so pure, so heedless, survives in its atmosphere, and this revival of my past charms me almost to tears. The life of that country is but a common, vulgar life, I know. But there is a repose about it, a quiet well-being, in which thought and feeling, when not prisoned in the narrow circle of our daily round, are able to exercise their sweet gift of healing. Ah, how I feel to the core that vanished sweetness! I am weak, my dear Henriette. I sometimes think I could be quite happy in a simple, common life which I should ennoble from within. Then I think of you and I look higher.

"Yet in this mild and calm atmosphere of Tréguier, you can easily see how difficult was my position with regard to mamma. She had but the faintest suspicion of my state of mind, and she tried to trace my secret thought under the least of my words and actions. And I was afraid to let her see the truth and yet I felt I ought not to conceal it. Think how I suffered! The *necessity* of telling her all, the fear of her cruel disappointment, led me, hour by hour, into almost contradictory courses. And our good mother, with a disastrous cleverness, interpreted them all accord-

ing to the desire of her heart. She would take no hint, no mere suggestion. At last one day—one hour—which I shall never forget, I was forced to be more explicit. I said clearly that my vocation was *doubtful* . . . that I must exact a *delay*. Well, from that hour she had been more calm. She is less afraid when I speak of studying in the Paris University, when I speak of a possible journey to Germany. I knew how to turn all these projects in harmony with her dearest scheme—our meeting, the progress of my studies, &c. Do not mention to her that I am at an inn! Ah, dear mother, how dear she is to me—my greatest happiness but also my greatest trouble. I should hate to be vulgar in any part or parcel of my inner nature; but I am sure that I am not, in my love for her!

"I arrived in Paris on the 9th of October, in the evening. That same night I slept at the hotel. The next days I passed with all due gravity and decorum in terminating my connection with St Sulpice. I was charmed by the esteem and the affection which the fathers showed me. My Hebrew professor has promised to recommend me very warmly to M. Quatremère: he holds to me as to his favourite pupil. I could not have imagined so much broadness of view in the strictest orthodoxy. They are persuaded that I

shall return to St Sulpice, and,—would you believe it, dear Henriette?—I like to think so myself, and was enchanted to hear them say so. Accuse me of weakness if you like. I am not of those who take a side, and never lose hold, whatever they may think, whatever Science prove. And Christianity is so large a thing, a man may well hold more than one opinion concerning it, according to the different degrees of his instruction. Still, at this moment, I do not see how I can in conscience become a Catholic priest.

"I have seen Monsieur Dupanloup: he was delightful! He granted me an interview of an hour and a half—a thing he never does. How well he understood me at once! He did me so much good! He replaced me in my lost high sphere, whence these practical preoccupations had caused me to fall in some degree. I was quite frank and explicit with him, and he was very pleased with me. I recognised the superior mind in his advice, so clear and to the point. He promised to do *his utmost* for me. . . .

"You must let me assure you, dearest, that, say what you will, I cannot spend all this year at your expense. I have quite decided to accept some post which will not encroach too much upon my time and may even be useful to me. . . .

"I have been to see the directors of Stanislas College. I had the best of references. Some of my old comrades are there and had spoken of me. I allow that I should like, best of all, to enter as a teacher at Stanislas. There, my dear, I should be treated honourably and morally. Perhaps you do not like the prospect, as the college is directed by ecclesiastics; but it is formed exactly on the model of the University. And I have been most frank. I have explained to the provisor the reason of my leaving St Sulpice. And think what an admirable transition! No one would be astonished to see me pass from St Sulpice to Stanislas, and no one would be astonished to see me move on from Stanislas to another college of the university! And mamma would be delighted: it was one of her ideas."

Stanislas is in fact an ecclesiastical college participating in the examinations and other advantages of the lay public schools of Paris. In the touching and honourable engagement which the venerable Order of St Sulpice was fighting with an inexperienced governess in Poland for the soul of Ernest Renan, the last rally had not yet been sounded. The Church did not by any means despair of her acolyte. And he, perhaps, had never felt more drawn towards the House of God.

"I spend my evenings in the church of St

Sulpice," he wrote to his friend, the Abbé Cognat.[1] . . . There is no more happiness for me on earth. . . . I remember my mother, my little room, my books, my dreams, my quiet walks at my mother's side. . . . All the colour seems to have faded out of life."

It is probable that the Fathers counted on this reaction and were well aware that the towers of St Sulpice never look more noble than from the other side of the square—from the windows, say, of Mademoiselle Céleste's stuffy but respectable small clerical hotel. Nor can we wonder at their error. They knew their pupil in his sweet humour and his docility, in his attachment to themselves and to the Church: they knew him as an imaginative, serene, and hopeful child; they did not recognise as yet that granite resistance which underlay this graciousness of disposition, and which it was impossible to undermine. Unimpassioned, sincere, curious above all things of the truth, Ernest Renan was not to be led in any path but that he saw before him. Even while the reverend ecclesiastics of Stanislas and St Sulpice were putting their heads together in a charitable purpose of friendly circumvention, Renan was writing to his sister concerning "the

[1] Renan's letters to the Abbé Cognat, during the years 1845-6, are reprinted in the Appendix to his "Souvenirs de Jeunesse."

singularity of his relations with them, which afforded him the opportunity of making the most valuable psychological observations." He was interested, and touched, and sceptical, and heart-broken, with equal sincerity. The fathers, strangely enough, knew little of his religious scruples: Monsieur Dupanloup alone asserted that they amounted to a total loss of faith. Prompted by a reserve which made him dread to exhibit in public his inmost wound,—and, perhaps, inspired by that morbid horror of the commonplace which haunted Renan throughout his youth,—he kept to himself the moral and philosophical origin of his doubts, and put forward only his scientific scruples. He was acutely conscious (the theme recurs again and again in his letters), that the recalcitrant seminarist is rarely a heroic personage. If he had to doubt, at least he meant to doubt with distinction and originality.

So he spoke to the astonished Fathers of the inexact philology of the Vulgate, or the erroneous date assigned by the Church to the Book of Daniel. St Sulpice knew how to deal with the mere sensuous backslider; it knew how to deplore, to deprecate, and if need be to imprecate, the torments of revolt, the passionate despair, of a Lamennais. It could not take these niceties of scholarship so seriously — a mitigated contact

with reality would soon, it opined, bring the fancies of a dreamer within bounds.

And doubtless St Sulpice counted also on the contrast between the warm kindness of the Church and the shrewdness of the world, ever suspicious of the unfrocked clerical. Monsieur Dupanloup offered his purse to Renan. He can not have been quite pleased to hear that, out of her savings, Mademoiselle Renan had already sent her brother a sum of eight and forty pounds. Moreover, by some prodigy of feminine ingenuity, the little governess at Zamocz had obtained for her brother letters of introduction to the most eminent scholars of the day. She had thus made Renan in some measure independent of the Church.

The worst of his trial was now, in truth, over for Renan. His great act of resolution had, as it were, cleared the air. There was no more compromising. Like many naturally undecided persons, Renan pursued tenaciously a course of conduct once adopted, knowing in what an eddy of ceaseless irresolution he would be flung by another change of front. Those who met him at the moment of his secession from St Sulpice observed in him none of the poignant anxiety of the Christian who feels his faith slip from him. He had the look of a young philosopher, calm, resolute, smiling, who sees new immense horizons

open before him. For the moment he was preoccupied by his practical affairs which he took seriously, although not tragically.

It is characteristic of Renan's complex, curious and quiet-tempered nature that his change of opinion provoked in him no aversion towards his lost ideal. He did not desire to burn what he had once adored. He went on adoring with a difference. He maintained his fealty to M. Le Hir as a spiritual superior and chose him for his confessor—for this strange apostate continued to confess himself and to receive absolution. "It does me good, and is a great consolation. I will confess myself to you when you are in orders," he writes to his friend. He was on terms of intimacy—almost of unction—with the Abbé Gratry, the Superior of Stanislas. For Renan entered Stanislas, as St Sulpice intended him to do, much to the distrust and discomfort of Henriette. The young usher, at six-and-twenty pounds a year, admitted to terms of such flattering familiarity with his directors, saw Stanislas at first through rose-coloured spectacles. . . . Henriette's fears are a mythical survival, interesting to the scientific observer.

"Because it is a College of Jes— . . . Oh, my dear Henriette, is it possible that a clever woman in the nineteenth century can amuse herself with

such nursery tales? In truth, I myself am no partisan of the Society: in all the force of the term, I do not *love* it. But from the bottom of my heart I laugh at the fantastic imagination which sees in it a sort of ogre-scarecrow to frighten babes with. It is a really remarkable item of psychology, a product of the faculty which gave us Bluebeard and other tales of wonder. 'Tis the love of mystery, the human need of the fantastic which has produced the legend of the Society of Jesus." All the same, a few days later our young psychologist left Stanislas, as he had left St Sulpice. He had been very happy with the Jesuits. But his lucidity saw through their judicious wiles. "'Tis a duty to go. I have made a great sacrifice: it would be absurd to hesitate before a small one."

When, therefore, Renan was required to wear a cassock and conform, merely in outward things of course, to his ecclesiastical environment, he sighed—but went away. "They were very nearly taking me again in their net," he wrote to Henriette. But he left them, shut upon him with a pang of regret the door of the House of the Lord, and sought that world of laymen which appeared to him so sordid, almost immoral, and unfriendly. "For I need an atmosphere of moral feeling," he remarked to his sister. What he needed still

more was an atmosphere of independence, in which to work out his own salvation. That at least he found in the school for young gentlemen where he was admitted as parlour-boarder—or rather as a sort of pupil-teacher, since he received his board in return for the lessons he gave.

The house was in a steep street of the Montagne Sainte Geneviève, known to-day as the Rue de l'Abbé de l'Epée. In those days it was called the Rue des deux Eglises. Renan must often have smiled as he read the name. For God had led him indeed into the Street of Two Churches, nor was the second, in his eyes, less holy than the first.

"Long ago," he writes to the Abbé Cognat, "already when I went up to the altar to receive the tonsure, I was tormented by terrible doubts. But my superior urged me on, and I had always heard that it was my duty to obey. So I went up, but God is my witness that in the intention of my heart, I took for my portion that Truth which is the hidden God! I dedicated myself to her quest, for her sake I renounced all profane motives and ambitions—nor shall I consider myself false to my vow until, abandoning my soul to vulgar cares, I content myself with the material aims which suffice to worldly men. Till then, I can repeat, *Dominus pars*. . . . Man

PART II

CHAPTER I

NEW IDEAS

IN the first days of November 1845 Ernest Renan entered on his duties at M. Crouzet's school. They were not stimulating, they were not inspiring, but they left him his whole day free for work. During some two hours, of an evening, he superintended the studies of seven youths who followed the classes of the Lycée Henri IV. In return, without diminishing his sister's little store, he received a place at table and a small room to himself. His wants were supplied, his liberty was complete, his leisure was ample; save for his state of mind—but that is everything!—he might have been happy. Alas, he was dull and sad. The world, in his eyes, appeared terribly mediocre: a desert, tediously overpopulate, a shabby wilderness of fifth-rate souls. He felt numb and shaken as one who has had a great fall. A month ago he had been almost a priest, belonging by implication to a superior order. He had been appointed professor

in the Archbishop's College. He had been recognised as a Semitic scholar. And behold, he was little better than an usher in M. Crouzet's school.

For more than two months he kept his situation a secret from his mother. By a pious fraud he continued to "paint the future," to speak of Stanislas. But too many persons counted on Mme. Renan's influence over her devoted boy for his position to remain a secret. Poor loving woman, she did not attempt to persuade him! She wrote him heart-broken letters. He, her delicate lad, her pride, her darling, to think he was "on the streets!" for so she phrased it. "You know, dear, even a mouse in your room used to keep you awake. You were never used to hardship!

"O Joseph, mon aimable
Fils affable,
Les bêtes t'ont dévoré!"

In those first dull November days at M. Crouzet's school, something of the melancholy which had tarnished all things for the young seminarist of St Nicholas hung again over Ernest Renan, and menaced him with that creeping nostalgia so deadly to the Breton. His letters to Henriette are steeped in disappointment. . . ,

"Now that I see them at close quarters, men are less refined, less intellectual than I had imagined them. . . . I feel lost in this cold world, incurious of the Divine. . . . Since Christianity is not true, nothing interests me or appears worth my attention." What was the use of striving and struggling in this unimportant throng of mortals? "*J'aime mieux ne pas mentir et caresser ma petite pensée*," he wrote to the Abbé Cognat in a phrase too charming to translate.

Renan had no longer any hope of regaining his faith. . . . Faith is a sentiment, and, once lost, there is no regaining it by evidence. . . . Doubt is an act of reason in which evidence is everything. Once we judge religious history by the ordinary rules of scientific criticism, the authenticity of Catholic tradition can no longer compel our assent. Renan continued to read the Scriptures. But the Bible, read as any other book, appears merely a collection of Oriental masterpieces, beautiful as poetry, valuable as history, but holding no peculiar promise for our souls. He looked into the empty heavens, saw no Christ on His throne there, and brooded with an obstinacy which had a sort of pleasure in it over the completeness of his desolation.

This *delectatio morosa* is dangerous to a con-

templative temperament. That way, if not madness, melancholia lies; the disease is potential in many Celtic constitutions. For some weeks, Ernest Renan, so like his mother, felt his father's dull and sluggish blood stir ominously at his heart. But a fortunate circumstance shattered his lethargy. A new friendship absorbed him. The oldest of his pupils, a young M. Berthelot, some eighteen years of age, was studying advanced mathematics and philosophy at Henri IV. They lodged on the same landing.

"It was in November 1845 that I first set eyes on Ernest Renan. He was four years older than I, but he had, perhaps, even less experience of life—if such a term may be used of young men, the one eighteen, the other two-and-twenty. He had just left the Seminary—not without some vague inclination towards a possible resumption of the sacerdotal cloth. His gentle, serious bearing, his taste for things intellectual and moral, pleased me at once, and we became friends."[1]

"We had the same religion," says Renan simply.[2] "And that religion was the worship of Truth."

Truth is a diamond of many facets, and the

[1] *Correspondance Berthelot—Renan. Revue de Paris:* 15 Juillet 1897.

[2] *Discours et Conférences*, p. 231.

young men had seen her at different angles. Each knew most things the other did not know. Renan was already expert in theology, philosophy, philology and history. But young Berthelot revealed to him a new world of vaster vistas and more precise perspectives :—the magnificent certitudes of physical and natural science. Forty years after those first conversations in their attics of the Rue des Deux Eglises, fragments and echoes of those midnight marvels linger still in the mind of Renan.

"How infinitely the atomic theories of the chemist and crystallographer surpass that vague notion of Matter, which verifies scholastic philosophy! . . .[1]

"Think of knowing that our earth is a ball some three thousand leagues in diameter . . . that the sun, up there, is thirty-eight millions of leagues away, and that it is one million five hundred thousand times larger than the earth!"[2]

If Spinoza was a God-intoxicated man, Renan was a man intoxicated by the splendour of the universe! There are stars whose light falls through space ten thousand years before it reaches us, falling at the rate of over

[1] *Discours et Conférences*, p. 16.
[2] *Feuilles Détachées*, p. 156.

thirty millions of leagues in seven minutes! There are suns, larger than ours, and perhaps whole solar systems, in the formless white blurs that film the skies on cloudless nights. The heavens proclaim, indeed, the glory of the Eternal; and Renan knew how great a temptation Job resisted when he cried, "I have seen the moon advance in her majesty, O God, and I have not bowed the knee!"

As the last shreds of his faith fell from before him, lo! in their place he discovered the whole unspeakable mystery of the Cosmos. So, with the first elements of astronomy and physics, Renan learned that passionate devotion to the universe which engrosses the whole mind, and makes all private sorrow a thing of slight account. Already he might have exclaimed with Marcus Aurelius, "All that suiteth thee, O Cosmos, suiteth me!" He was in very truth a "citizen of the great city," a conscient atom of the whole. The world was too vast, our span of years too short, the sum of science attainable too tremendous, for life, however sad, to be adjudged a failure. Yes, in 1846 he was already the Renan who, years later, wrote of Amiel: "The man who has time to keep a private diary has never understood the immensity of the universe. There is so much to learn! In face of this colossal piece of work

how can we stop to consume our own hearts, to doubt, to repine? . . . My friend M. Berthelot would have his hands full, had he a hundred consecutive lives, nor find in any one of them the time to write about himself! . . . Everything has to be done, or done all over again, in natural and social science. When we feel ourselves called to labour at this infinite task, we are too busy to pause and brood over the little private melancholies we may fall in with by the way."[1] . . . "When I think of the unique pair of friends we were," he says elsewhere, "I see before me two young priests in their surplices, walking arm in arm. We should have blushed to have asked each other a favour, or even a piece of advice. Neither of us was greatly occupied with himself, and neither of us was greatly occupied with the other. Our friendship consisted in what we learned together."[2]

Indeed they learned many things together, but they learned many things apart. As time went on M. Berthelot was drawn more and more exclusively into the sphere of physics, and especially of chemistry, as we all know, to our admiration. Semitic philology continued to engross M. Renan. He wrote to his sister: "I have

[1] *Feuilles Détachées*, p. 359.
[2] *Souvenirs*, p. 339.

so many new and just ideas! I am throwing all my heart into my work—all I know and all I am—and I have the instinct of success."

His canvas was the series of lectures which he had delivered the preceding year at St Sulpice, and which the Abbé Le Hir strongly urged him to publish. The book was to be a Hebrew grammar. But, in the hands of this ardent young thinker, philology became a new instrument of psychology. For the character of a nation is transfixed in its language, and a Hebrew grammar is a diagram of the Semitic soul. In the speech of the Jew or the Arab, as in his nature, you will find something irreductible and stubborn, a dignified simplicity, a non-existence of the finer shades; a something monotonous, which recalls the desert in its immense uniformity. So theorised young M. Renan, in that general history of Semitic languages which was to introduce him to the world of science.

The first sketch of this important work, presented in manuscript to the Academy of Inscriptions in 1847, by a young man of four-and-twenty, a pupil-teacher in a school for boys, obtained the Prix Volney, one of the most important distinctions awarded by the Institute of France.

Thus, barely two years after leaving St Sulpice, Renan saw a new career open before him. He continued to pass his University examinations: he was successively Bachelier and Licencié. In 1847 he took his degree as Agrégé de Philosophie, that is to say, Fellow of the University, and, in consequence, he was offered the Professorship of Philosophy in the Lycée of Vendome. Here, and later, — during the long vacation at St Malo,—Renan occupied his leisure by a thesis on Averroës which was to procure him his doctor's degree. Half convinced by so much success, his mother let herself accept some consolation. Her "fils affable" was still her "fils affable": amiable, studious, gifted, as of old. He had come back to live with her. His grave morality seemed almost orthodox. No scandal had attended his secession from the priesthood. "My mother shows the truest liberality of mind," Renan wrote to M. Berthelot in 1847; "she fully approves my system, which is never to express, by word or deed, either affection or antipathy for the profession which might have been my own. I soon brought her to see my point of view. And indeed we have many a piquant conversation on this head." But despite the charm of home, despite his native air, Renan was not happy in the narrow provincial circle

which he had re-entered. He missed the intellectual stimulus of Paris. He was glad when a small temporary appointment,—as assistant master in the Lycée of Versailles—permitted him to return to the capital and resume his interrupted studies.

CHAPTER II

1848

THE father of M. Berthelot was a doctor, an intellectual man, above all, a benevolent man. His practice was in a poor neighbourhood; of modest origin himself, he was interested in many philanthropic schemes. He was a firm Republican. "The first I had seen," wrote Renan, who barely could remember his father and his uncles. Opposed to the bourgeois spirit of the Monarchy of July, an enthusiastic believer in the Socialist transformation of society, Dr Berthelot influenced his son and, through him, the ever-impressionable Ernest Renan. . . . Yet all through the beginning of '48, immersed in his studies, the young scholar had listened to his friend's gospel with a somewhat vacant ear. He was engrossed by an essay on the study of Greek in Mediæval Europe, which appeared to him more immediately important. In all things, always, he found it hard to take a side. He distrusted extremes. His sense of the relativity of appear-

ances debarred him from a passionate conviction in politics no less than in religion. Moreover, if he was by opinion a Liberal, by temperament Renan was Conservative. A natural love for the Past, a natural dread of innovation, hampered him in the sphere of political reform :

"I shall never break many lances for this sort of thing," he wrote to M. Berthelot, in September 1847.

Then the Revolution broke out in February. The King and his family went into exile. There was a riot in May. One morning Ernest Renan had to climb a barricade in order to reach the College of France. He climbed it and arrived in due time at the Sanscrit lecture-room ; but there was no lecture that day, and behold ! the College was full of soldiers ! The young scholar sighed and continued his walk, in order to study Sanscrit at M. Burnouf's private house. Civil war reddened the streets in June. Ernest Renan awoke in earnest and turned all his mind to the problems of Socialism.

I know no page in Flaubert's *Education Sentimentale* which gives a more vivid picture of a political massacre than we find in some of Renan's letters to his absent sister. The dreamer, startled from his dream, sees the dreadful reality before him with a horrified acuteness.

25th June 1848.

"Frightful sight! The whole day we heard nothing but the whistling of bullets and the clang of the tocsin. . . ."

26th June.

"The evening and last night were worse than ever. There was a massacre at the Gate of St Jacques, another at the Fontainebleau Gate. I spare you details. The St Bartholomew offers nothing like them. There must be in human nature something naturally cannibal which bursts out at certain moments. As for me, I would willingly have fought with the Garde Nationale until, in their turn, the guards became the murderers. No doubt they are guilty, these poor mad insurrectionaries who shed their blood and know not what they ask—but are they not guiltier who, by system, have deadened in them every human feeling?"

1st July.

"The storm is over. If in such a state of things it were permissible to appeal to the artistic sense, I would call the Paris of these last days the strangest, the most indescribable of great sights. A few hours after the fighting was over I visited the field of the combat. Unless you

have witnessed such a thing, my dear, you cannot imagine the great scenes of humanity. In the Rue St Martin, in the Rue St Antoine, and in the Rue St Jacques, between the Panthéon and the Quays, there was not a single house but was riddled with cannon-ball. Some of them were perforated to sheer open work! The fronts of the houses, all the windows, were pierced through and through with bullets—wide streaks of blood, broken and abandoned guns, marked the places where the fight had been the fiercest. Built with a marvellous art, and constructed, not as they used to be with heaps of cobblestone, but with the large flagstones of the footpath, the barricades, with their projecting and retreating angles, had a look of fortresses. There was one every fifty paces. The Place de la Bastille was the most frightful chaos: all the trees cut down or bent and twisted by the cannon balls; on one side whole houses demolished or still in flames; on another, veritable towers of defence, built out of beams of timber, overturned carriages, and heaps of stones. In the middle of all that, a crowd, dizzy and half out of its mind; soldiers worn out with fatigue, asleep on the pavement, almost under the feet of the people. The rage of the vanquished disguised under an affected calm; the disorder of the conquerors opening a path through

the demolished barricades—the public pity craving alms and lint for the wounded; all combined in a spectacle of the sublimest originality, in which the whole gamut of humanity was heard in an admirable discord: man, face to face with man, naked, without disguise, with nothing but his primitive instincts."

16th July.

"Horror of exact reprisals! I am always for the massacred, even though they be guilty. The National Guard has been guilty of atrocities I scarcely dare recount.

"After the battle was over, posted on the terrace of the Ecole des Mines, they amused themselves by "potting" at their leisure, as a form of recreation, the passers-by in the adjacent streets, where the thoroughfare was still open. That may have been the last flicker of the fury of the fray. But what is awful to think of, is the hecatomb of prisoners sacrificed several days later. During whole afternoons I have heard the ceaseless firing in the Luxembourg Gardens—and yet the fighting was over! The sound and the thoughts it suggested, exasperated me to such a degree that I determined to see for myself, so I went and called on one of my friends whose windows overlook the gardens. It was too true.

If I did not see the murderers with my own eyes, I saw what was worse, what I never can forget, and what, if I did not try to lift myself above personal sentiments, would leave in my soul an everlasting hate. . . . The unhappy prisoners were packed in the garrets of the Palace, under the leads, in the stifling heat of the roof. Every now and then one of them would thrust his head out of the dormer window, for a breath of air. Each head served as a target for the soldiers in the garden below—they never missed their aim! After that, I say the middle class is capable of the massacres of the Terror!"

1st July.

"I am not a Socialist. I am convinced that none of the theories of the hour is destined to triumph, *in its actual form.* A system—a narrow, a partial thing by its very essence—can never realise itself. The system is a burgeon which must burst its sheath in order to become a truth, universally recognised, universally applied. . . . I am a Progressist, that is all. . . . I persist in believing that from petty passion to petty passion, from personal ambition to personal ambition, through misfortune, through crime and bloodshed, we are none the less in the act of a great *transformation* for the greater good of humanity."

16th July.

"The great births of humanity should be seen from afar. We see the apparition of Christianity as something exclusively pure, sacred, and supernatural. . . . And yet what sects, how mad, monstrous, and immoral!—accompanied, and were even confounded with that white and beautiful doctrine! . . . We also have our gnostics!" . . .

2nd August.

"Adieu, dear, excellent Henriette; think often of your brother. Never despair of France!"[1]

I know no more curious moment of psychology than the book in which Renan attempted to answer the problems posed by the movement of 1848. The immense volume is as young as a primrose, full of the joy of life, full of energy, charity, hope — above all, full of faith. The crowded, living, voluntary pages stretch out their hundred arms to the future like some monstrous Indian god, who needs innumerable hands to bestow with and to beckon, to bless with and to curse, and in whom the vital principle is too abundant for symmetry or grace. *L'Avenir de la Science*, is our young priest's first sermon, heavier, more crammed with matter than those

[1] *Lettres de* 48. Revue de Paris, 15 Avril 1896.

we are accustomed to from his golden lips; full, not only of his own ideas but of the theories of his time and his environment. The multiple, heterogeneous masterpiece takes for its text the mystic words of the gospel, *Unum est necessarium.* But this one thing needful is the Infinite—the Ideal, identic in its essence, whatever be the form in which it appears to us:—philosophy, science, poetry, art, moral beauty, moral strength, or mere natural loveliness, no less divine. To recombine these different elements—to trace these divergent rays to their common centre, which is God, should be the chief end of knowledge. The future of science is a new religion, to be founded, not on abstract reasoning, not on any pretended revelation from on high, but on the most patient, the most critical, the minutest study of all the material profusely strewn around us. Penetrate matter to find the secret soul in it! The study of science is still the service of God. Such is the teaching of *L'Avenir de la Science.*

"I am convinced there is a science of the Origin of Man which will be constructed one day, not from mere ratiocination and hypothesis, but from the results of scientific research. He who shall contribute to the solving of this problem —though his test be imperfect, will do more for

true philosophy than he had achieved by fifty years of metaphysics."

Even while Renan was writing these lines a young naturalist of much the same way of thinking was classing his specimens and comparing his notes. Some ten years later, we read the *Origin of Species.* A reaction against the vague and void official spiritualism of his day, inclined philosophy to draw its conclusions from the exact results of science. The tide has now turned so far in this direction that we forget the originality, in 1848, of doctrines which at present appear the merest common-sense. In 1897 all our young philosophers are historians, or philologists, or physiologists, or students of natural or social science. But, fifty years ago, Philosophy was much too great a lady to do any useful work at all. She broidered her metaphysics in an ivory tower among the clouds.

"Believe me," said Renan, "your true philosopher is the philologist, the student of myths, the critic of social constitutions. By the subtle study of speech we remount the stream of time till we reach almost the source, till we come within hail of primitive man. By comparative grammar we touch our first ancestors; by comparative mythology we understand their soul, by social science we watch their development.

Every speech, every myth or legend, every form of social organisation from the humblest to the most august, ought to be compared and classified. The man who could thus evoke the origins of Christianity would write the most important book of the century. How I envy it him! Should I live and do well, I mean that book to be the task of my maturity."[1]

Science is thus an instrument of religion, nay, more, a religion in herself, modest but veracious, never going back from her word. The faith of the chosen few, must she remain incommunicable to the mass? How can a religion exclude nine-tenths of mankind? If intellectual culture were but a grace the more, but an added enjoyment, it might well remain the privilege of the elect, for man has no right to happiness. But once we admit that science is a religion—a temple where faith and truth join hands—how shall we forbid the threshold to those who chiefly need a religion? Shall we look upon the poor barbarians as a necessary refuse of waste matter? Shall we consider only them human who know? "I have seen the massacres of June. I have repulsed in my own heart the instinctive wish that the barbarians might perish. Shame on such a thought! There must be no more barbarians!

[1] *Avenir*, p. 278.

"Yet it is not easy to see how the many are to be induced to work out their own salvation. How shall we make a turbulent majority choose the better part when, as a matter of fact, it does not prefer it, thinks it tiresome, prefers the pothouse and the barricade? The ancients had convenient means to this end: augurs, oracles, Egerias, who arranged the truth in a way understanded of the people. Others have had recourse to armies. . . . It is very clear that Science will none of these. It is much less clear, however, by what miracle she is to descend upon and illuminate the recalcitrant mass of the ignorant. . . .

"Above all let us never dream that Science must descend to the level of people. A cheap science, an easy science, a popular science, is the most useless of catch-words. Science must be serious, difficult, comprehensible only to her own adepts, in her more abstruse and secret recesses. But by the diffusion of a sound elementary instruction all may be made capable of understanding the value and the gist of these researches—all may follow them in their outer circuit; all may be set upon the sacred track. If you object that to attain such cultivation, the working class must receive more money for less work, in order to secure the time for study, I reply: so be it! Let us simplify our lives. I have no objection to

the socialistic phalanstery, nor even to a salutary reign of terror. These do not interfere with Science. The artless life of a community where none would be rich or poor may even be favourable to her development, Genius lives on simple things, and Spinoza contemplated the divine substance in no palace while he polished the lenses which brought him bread. Democracy has no terror for Science. Let us all be brothers, in truth, in simplicity, in generous and confident human sympathy."

Such, in effect, is the gospel which Ernest Renan caught amid the gun smoke and the ominous fusillades of 1848. It is easy to see how much of these theories is natural to the author, the result of his real convictions and his peculiar temperament, and how much is due to the influence of the *milieu* and the contagion of an epidemic enthusiasm. All Renan's later work is based on that psychological interpretation of facts obtained by a patient scientific method which he advocates in his earliest book. His most fantastic philosophy has ever a solid piece of sober erudition at the base. He often reads too much into his text, between the lines, but he starts from his text, and never evolves out of his own brain a system independent of historic proofs. He applies to the history of religion and to the problems of

exegesis, the experimental method of a student in physics or natural history. Thus, in all essentials, the Renan of the *Avenir de la Science*, is already Renan. True, the Renan of the future was to be no democrat. But his turn of mind, infinitely aristocratic, infinitely jealous of the rights of the minority, was never subject to the powers that be. The aristocracy which Renan commended was an aristocracy of personal merit, an upper house of virtue and intelligence. Spinoza and the fishermen of Galilee were the high barons of his heraldry. It is impossible to read the tender, human, fraternal pages of the *Apostles* and *St Paul* without perceiving how much of the great dream of '48 lingered in the mind of Renan. The day was to dawn when, mournfully, he was to admit that the barbarians are, in truth, a necessary refuse. But his barbarians were not merely the unpossessing classes: they were the selfish, the dull, the mean, the narrow, in every class, high or low, rich or poor, one with another.

L'Avenir de la Science is an example of the subjective quality of Renan's imagination. He has sympathy in abundance—the subtlest, the most penetrating, the most sensitive of any writer of his time—but he has not a particle of dramatic imagination. He interprets all things by himself. If he desire to save Society, he will adjure Society

to quit the seminary, turn philologist, and set itself to study the origins of Christianity. In the *Avenir de la Science*, Renan projects his own sensibility and his own experience into Contemporary Society, just as later on he was to project them into Jesus Christ and Marcus Aurelius. No man ever lived more resolutely in the whole; but in the whole, as he sees it, he puts a reflection of himself. He has the extraordinary gift, attributed by physicians to certain nervous patients, of exteriorising his own sensibility.

By the time Renan had finished his book, '48 was over, the fever of democracy had passed: the young author could only regard his socialistic projects as curious examples of the mythopoetic faculty. No doubt they interested him from this point of view also. Every mode and phase of his own and the world's development impassioned his eager intelligence. It was all matter for study. What though one star fell out of the myriads in heaven? What though your perfect democracy proved a poet's day dream? The universe teemed with other problems, other mysteries, equally important, equally engrossing.

In 1849, M. Renan obtained from the French Government one of those travelling scholarships which, across the Channel, are dignified by the name of missions. He was to seek in the

libraries of Italy certain documents required by the Academy of Inscriptions for its *Histoire Littéraire de la France;* he was also to complete his own thesis on Averroës. For eight months Ernest Renan remained in the Peninsula.

Suddenly freed from the bracing influence of his environment in Paris, Renan rapidly regained his natural bent: dreamy, idealizing, poetic. More than once his letters from Rome must have exasperated his democratic correspondent.[1] There is so much religion in them, so much art, vague piety, sentiment reflected from the Roman landscape! "Tell me less about the monuments and more about the condition of the people" answers, in substance, Marcel Berthelot. In vain; Renan has fallen under the sway of the Past.

"This journey had the most remarkable influence on my mind. I knew nothing of Art, and lo! I beheld her, radiant and full of consolations. A faëry enchantress seemed to whisper me the words which the Church, in her hymn, says to the wood of the Cross:—

> "'Flecte ramos, arbor alta,
> Tensa laxa viscera,
> Et rigor lentescat ille
> Quem dedit nativitas.'

A sort of soft breeze relaxed my native rigour.

[1] *Correspondance Renan-Berthelot.* Revue de Paris, 1 Août 1897.

Almost all my illusions of 1848 dropped from me, for I saw they were impossible. I recognised the fatal necessities of human society, I resigned myself to a condition of the creation in which a great deal of evil serves to produce a little good, where a drop of exquisite aroma is distilled from an enormous *caput mortuum* of refuse."

Yet, whilst admitting the absurdity of yesterday's chimera, Renan did not cease to follow the ever beckoning ideal. The Infinite remained the eternal guide. And on the ledger of the Monastery of Monte Cassino he wrote in 1850:—

"*Unum est necessarium; Maria elegit optimam partem.*"

CHAPTER III

THE VALE OF GRACE

THE disenchantment which followed 1848 combined with the divine spectacle of Italy to turn the mind of Renan from the future towards the past. He saw no longer in his dreams a socialistic phalanstery with its Spinoza occupied in an optician's work-room. His fancy preferred to evoke some steep small Umbrian town with Etruscan walls and Roman ruins, with mediæval towers set high above Renaissance palaces and the overladen Jesuit churches of the Catholic Revival. Here was food for the mind: the past is so poetic! We imagine the future so flat and full of prose! The Celt especially is open to the magical pathos of historic memories, and, now that once Ernest Renan had unsealed his hearing to that siren-song, the music of the barricades might pipe to him in vain!

Impressionable to excess, Renan, while guarding his will fixed on one steadfast aim, changed the colour of his thoughts according to the atmos-

phere he dwelt in. Imagine a chameleon, progressing unswervingly in one direction, but sometimes blue, sometimes rose, sometimes green, in the course of his invariable traject! Such is Renan, the bizarre and eminently Celtic fusion of a constant mind with a sensitive temperament. Among the marvels of the Sabine Hills, the utilitarian ideal which yesterday he had invoked, appeared odious to him. He continued to serve Truth and Science—but no longer in the precincts of Democracy. Rough-shod, iron goddess, might her feet never tread the Seven Hills!

"As for me, it is with something akin to terror that I face the day when life shall penetrate anew that sublime heap of ruins which is Rome! I cannot conceive her other than she is: a museum of dilapidated majesties, a tryst for the exiles of our work-a-day world, a meeting-place for dethroned monarchs, disenchanted statesmen, and sceptical philosophers weary of their kind. Should the fatal level of modern common-place threaten this mass of sacred relics, I would fain the priests and the monks of Rome were paid to maintain within her ruins their customary melancholy and squalor, and to preserve all round about them fever and the desert."[1]

Renan's democracy had been a short brain-

[1] *Essais de morale et de Critique*, p. 259.

fever. It had passed: the *coup d'état* disgusted him once for all with the lower classes. The development of his ideas made it easy for certain of his friends to dissuade him from the publication of *L'Avenir de la Science.* Although already in July 1849 a chapter of the book had been printed in a review, with the mention: "to appear in a few weeks," the volume did not see the light, in fact, until 1890—less out of date than it would have been in the first flush of that reaction which forms the morrow of every revolution. Renan had been the first to suspect the inopportunity of yesterday's gospel. He was no longer under the exclusive influence of the Berthelots. On literary matters, he consulted Augustin Thierry — his mentor in letters—and M. de Sacy: each of them advised him to reserve his great work—to dispose of it page by page, chapter by chapter, in the form of essays and reviews; but not to overwhelm the public with his whole stock of unseasonable riches.

Thus, in five years, Renan had lost two ideals —Christianity and Socialism. Despite his robust faith in the future of Science, the present world began to wear a disenchanted aspect. Our young fanatic of yesterday was in some danger of becoming one of those "sceptical philosophers, weary of their kind" for whom the Eternal City

appeared so convenient a limbo. If we could suppose a special Providence designed to watch over so notorious a heretic, now was the moment for its intervention. And lo! his sister, having finished her ten years' engagement in Poland, summoned Ernest to meet her in Berlin. And Renan encountered his Egeria.

"When we meet again, my dear, we shall hardly recognise each other," Renan had written to his sister years before. And after ten years they met. The slim young woman of nine and twenty, gracious of aspect, who had bidden farewell to her brother in the seminary parlour, was grown into a woman of forty, plain in the face, prematurely aged and lined by the hard winters of Poland. The girlish lightness had departed from her figure; an affection of the larynx threatened the sweetness of her voice. In air and dress Mademoiselle Renan affected an elderly fashion which nothing in her looks belied. Her brother glanced at her, realised the sad change,—and worshipped his austere Egeria as a second mother, the comforting mother of his mind. She, on the other hand, can have seen small trace of the ungainly provincial seminarist she had left in the travelled young philosopher of seven and twenty who stood before her. For a moment they were strangers in each other's eyes —

but they were intimate to the marrow of the mind.

Henriette returned to Paris with Ernest. She had lost her youth and her health in Poland, but she had paid off her father's debts, redeemed the mortgage on her mother's property, established her brother in the way he should go, and a little purse of savings remained to set up house with. They were to live together. Each had long dreamed this dream, and five years before Ernest had written—"We shall be so happy, dear! I am easy-tempered and gentle. You will let me live the serious simple life I love, and I will tell you all I think and all I feel. We shall have our friends too—refined and elect spirits—who will beautify our life."

They chose a small apartment near the Val-de-Grace, with windows looking over the garden of the Carmelite Nuns. There was room for them and their books; place for M. Berthelot to sit and discuss with them all things under the sun; a seat for such of Ernest Renan's masters as would honour his home. Henriette had few friends and did not desire to enlarge her acquaintance. She had Ernest and that was enough.

Ernest was absent a part of every day at the National Library: he had been appointed to a small charge of Sub-Librarian. His salary,

with Henriette's savings, sufficed for their daily wants. While her brother was away the devoted sister copied out his manuscripts for him, made long abstracts from volumes needed for his work, corrected his proofs, took notes which might be of use to him, examined a mass of documents, verified dates and authorities. For amusement she looked out of the window at the nuns in their convent garden, or waited for Ernest's return. . . . Anxious pleasure of waiting, of listening for a glad step on the stair—and then the smile we expected, and the eager budget of the day's events!

In the evening, Ernest settled to his writing. "She had the greatest respect for my work. I have seen her sit by my side for hours of an evening, scarcely breathing lest she should interrupt my labours. Yet she loved to have me in her sight, and the door between our two rooms stood ever open. Her affection had become something so ripe and so discreet that the sweet communion of our thoughts was sufficient for her. Her heart,—jealous, exacting, as it was—demanded but a few minutes a day, since she alone was loved. Thanks to her strict economy, on our singularly limited resources she kept a house in which nothing was lacking and which could boast its own austere charm. . . .

She was an incomparable secretary. Her delicate censure discovered negligences and brusqueries which I had overlooked. It was she who persuaded me that every shade of thought can be expressed in a correct and simple style, that violent images and new-coined expressions betray either misplaced pretensions or ignorance of the real wealth at our disposal. Hence a profound change in the manner of my writing. I accustomed myself to reckon in advance on her remarks—hazarding many a brilliant passage to watch its effect upon her, whilst decided to sacrifice it if she observed it with disfavour."[1]

Henriette examined not only the manner but the matter. Her simple rectitude was disconcerted by Ernest's recurrent irony. "I had never suffered, and a discreet smile provoked by the weakness or the vanity of man, seemed a sort of philosophy." Many a winged shaft was offered on her shrine.

Fine writing, irony, and a certain abstract vagueness in spiritual matters; such were the qualities which Henriette was anxious to discipline and chasten in her gifted brother's writings. The tender inquisitress was not satisfied until all was pure, exact, discreet, and true. She said to her brother, "Be thou perfect!"

[1] *Ma sœur Henriette*, p. 36.

And a dash of mockery, a trace of vanity, the least little air of disdain, or flaunt of self-satisfaction, however pretty in itself, was a flaw in the absolute clear beauty she desired. Most of all, she sought to cultivate in him the habit of veracity, a habit the seminary had not inculcated, it appears. "I have never told a lie since 1851," wrote Ernest many years after her death.

Her efforts were seconded by Ernest's friends—by Augustin Thierry, who in 1851 introduced the young writer to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*; by M. de Sacy, who admitted him on to the staff of the *Débats*. "It was these two organs," said M. Renan in 1890, "who taught me how to write, that is to say, how to limit myself, how constantly to rub the angles off my ideas, how to keep a watchful eye on my defects."[1] The extraordinary absence of vanity which characterised Renan in his youth enabled him to profit by all this good advice without any juvenile soreness of feeling. He was right. Between the *Avenir de la Science*, written in 1848 and 1849, and the essays contributed to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the *Débats*, in the years immediately following 1851, there is fixed the abyss which divides work of fervent and interesting promise

[1] Preface to *Avenir*.

from the peculiar ripe perfection of a great writer. Renan's genius was to grow freer and fuller, at once more human and more fantastic, more audacious and more penetrating. Henceforth it will lose rather than gain in moral grace, in a certain exquisite gravity and elegance of spirit. And, perhaps, never again was the historian of religions so religious.

In Renan's delicate philosophy, made up of semi-tones and demi-tints, piety had out-lived faith. In 1856, he no longer believes in any of the myriad forms of the one informing soul. (πολλὰ ὀνόματα Μορφὴ μία.) But that essential idea of Religion, peculiar and necessary to human kind, he asserts to be immortal and destined to an infinite development. Shall the exquisite herald-angel remain chained, trammelled, wounded, dwarfed perchance, by fetters of our mortal forging? To strike off those fetters, thought Renan, was good knight's service. Set Religion free, let her move and grow, let her guide us unenslaved, unimprisoned. The refusal to adhere to a definite form of worship may be an act of faith in the future of Religion.

Thanks to Ernest's genius and Henriette's incessant vigilance, nothing in these early essays suggested the beginner, nor even the young man. They were rounded with a golden maturity.

The intrepidity of their conception was veiled by a becoming reserve of phrase: the oracle evidently wished to awake but not to startle his audience. They combine a soaring liberty of spirit with an exquisite candour. A great charm in these essays is that, so various in their subjects and their treatment, they are still invariable in their aim. United they form not an anthology, but a book. There is a link between them all—whether they treat of the historians of Jesus, the imitation of Christ, the lives of the Saints, or of Calvin, or Mahomet, or the Prophets of Israel, or of antique myths, or of the school of Hegel, or whether they delicately flagellate the vulgarities of American Protestantism. The author studies one by one these religious ideals, not dogmatically, but historically; he penetrates each movement, and tries to resume it in a typical figure, a sort of ideal representative; and this man he then evokes in his habit as he lived, with every detail of his most intimate originality. The portrait is singularly living, whether or no it be singularly like. . . . On this latter head I would reserve my opinion, ominously enlightened by a passage in one of Renan's letters to M. l'Abbé Cognat. . . .

"God forgive me for loving Ronge and Czersky if they be misleading spirits! For what I love in them—as in all other men to whom I dedicate

my enthusiasm—is a certain beautiful moral image of them which I create within myself. It is my own ideal which I love in them. Now, as to whether they really resemble this image? That appears to me, I admit, a matter of slight importance."

Imaginative, suggestive, subtle, Renan's essays as they appeared one by one in the early years of the Fifties, attracted more attention than the brother and sister dreamed of in their dear seclusion.

"What was my surprise when, one morning, a stranger of pleasant and intelligent appearance entered my attic. He complimented me on certain articles of mine which had appeared in the Reviews, and offered to unite them in a volume. Thereupon he produced a stamped document stipulating terms which I thought astonishingly generous, so much so that when he asked if all my future works should be comprised in the treaty, I consented."[1] The visitor was M. Michel Lévy, the then rising publisher, whose fortune Renan was to help to make; and the book, the delicious *Etudes d'Histoire Religieuse* immediately established him in the first rank of literature, if not of popular success. Published on the 20th of March 1857, the *Etudes d'Histoire*

[1] *Souvenirs*, 385.

Religieuse were succeeded on the 6th of June 1859, by the *Essais de Morale et de Critique.* Nor did Renan neglect the austerer courts of Science. In 1855 he had finally given to the world the *General History of Semitic Languages*, which, while still unpublished, had won the Volney Prize some eight years before. This book opened to the author the gates of the Institute. Uncontested master of Semitic philology in France, Renan was elected, in 1856, a Member of the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles Lettres.

Meanwhile, in 1852, Renan had published the work on *Averroës*, which brought him not only his doctor's degree, but his first reputation as a thinker. In *Averroës* the critic demonstrates the sterilising effect of orthodoxy on a noble and beautiful philosophy. Greek science, adopted by the Arab thinkers, fixed and crystallised by them into a dogma, becomes thenceforth a thing incapable of development or fecundity. To live and grow, a thing must pass from the category of *esse* into the category of *fieri.* Otherwise routine and dogmatism rust out the vital principle in even the greatest ideas; even as a pool of the purest water, set apart from the natural current of streams or the running rains of heaven, will stale and grow stagnant.

The interest of philosophic history lies rather in the picture it gives us of the growth of the human mind, than in the theories which it exhumes from bygone systems. The strange development of Greek science by a civilisation entirely alien to that of Greece interested the historic curiosity of Renan. Aristotle among the Arabs! So we might imagine Pekin to adopt the theories of Darwin and Pasteur, commentating them during centuries in a spirit of pure Chinese orthodoxy. The result would probably be of no mortal value—it would be piquant and unusual; it would represent an infrequent combination; it would have a value of its own in the eyes of the disinterested critic of the universe, curious of moral rarities. It would be interesting and useful to see in what unlikely back-waters the Stream of Life can meander when the main current is blocked. . . . The Arabs took the philosophy of Aristotle from the Syrian Christians, who had it from the pagan Greeks. The Mahommedan Arabs bequeathed it to the Spanish Jews, who passed it on to the Catholic doctors of the Middle Ages and Aristotle ended as a scholastic dogmatist in the Sorbonne! Translated, interpreted, and falsified in a dozen different senses, the intellectual curiosity of Greece contrived in these strange elements, if not to grow,

if not to produce, at least to languish in a sort of earthly limbo. *Die Wahrheit magt Niemand verbrennen*, sang Mechtild of Magdeburg, who, in her different degree, was another child of Aristotle.

But not merely the curiosity of the man of science attracted Renan to this subject. The strongest bent of his genius inclined him to consider, above all, the origins of things. He loved the delicate, rooty fibres as others love the flowers or the fruits; and half of his secret was his extraordinary faculty for seeing underground. The scholastic philosophy of the thirteenth century is only to be understood by a thorough knowledge of the principles of Jewish and Arab thought. When Renan did not understand a phenomenon, an imperious instinct bade him seek its source. His interpretation of Catholic scholasticism led him first of all to study Averroës, even as later on it led him to study the Early Church, and thence the Origins of Christianity, whence he delved yet further back into the Origins of Judaism. *Averroës* is the first link in a chain which Renan was to spend his life in forging.

CHAPTER IV

THE MORAL PHILOSOPHER

IF we hold with Averroës that all men are the transient expressions of one enduring soul, we find small difficulty in explaining how the noblest minds of a given generation arrive, unknown to each other, and simultaneously, at a like result. While Renan was painfully deducing from documents and inflections a new psychology, a young classical master at Nevers, named Hippolyte Taine, was writing to his friends :—

"Free psychology is a magnificent science founded on the philosophy of history . . . we must make of history an exact science. . . . I take refuge from the present in reading the Germans."[1]

Taine met Renan, five years his senior, in the offices of the great Liberal reviews. Save in the fundamental independence and unworldliness of their natures, no men could be more different.

[1] See, in M. Gabriel Monod's charming and valuable volume *Renan, Taine, Michelet*, the previously unpublished letters of Taine.

The genius of Taine was absolute, positive, vivid to the verge of harshness, apt to mass and class the confusion of things in a series of brilliant syntheses: above all things he was a logician. Renan,—subtle, complex and elusive, a historian and, above all, an analyst,—was for ever dividing and sub-dividing the spectrum of the universe into an immeasurable sequence of minor shades; was for ever attenuating his keen and often audacious analysis by a style serene and limpid beyond comparison. But a like idea of Truth and Liberty animated their souls. Equally admirable, equally eminent, Renan and Taine were as the two eyes of the generation which came to its maturity towards 1860.

The children of a later day can form no idea of the repression which followed '48, of those gloomy years in which thought was fettered, freedom stifled, in which a political and orthodox inquisition controlled the university and the press of a liberal nation. The fusillades of the Luxembourg were less detestable than the intellectual tyranny of the Empire of the Fifties. A government in reaction against armed insurrection has some excuse for excessive reprisals; it may be right in maintaining order even by a flagrant retaliation; but it is an error to believe that the premeditated dwarfing of a nation's intelligence

can ever be the guarantee of peace. Adversity, however, steels the obstinate; the Liberal party continued its opposition, aware that no ministry, however tyrannous, can destroy the mind of a nation. When the main channel is blocked, intelligence finds new outlets. The university, the public schools, letters, the press, were constrained by an iron censure, subject to exile, prison, suspension, daily fines. Yet journalism had never been more brilliant than under the Second Empire. Beulé contrived to outrage the Government with impunity in writing the history of Augustus. Rogeard bewailed the illiberal "Liberty of December" — *libertas Decembris*, as Horace puts it — and the censor dared not seize the allusion to the *coup d'état*.

France, in the Fifties, had at least one religion which was not a mere lip-service, and that was the doctrine of Liberalism. The little office of the *Débats*, with its red-tiled floor, and its two shabby ink-stained tables, was a sort of temple of the faith. There statesmen, financiers, scholars, artists, men of letters, met on a footing of ease and equality, the result of their sincere devotion to an aim outside themselves which made rank, fortune, influence, details of no importance. MM. de Sacy, Laboulaye, Prévost Paradol, John Lemoinne, the Bertins, were the priests of this austere Chapel;

and its creed was freedom, the rights of citizens, justice, and a ceaseless aspiration towards a nobler order of things. "Liberalism," wrote Renan more than once, "Liberalism represents for me the formula of the highest human development;" and the doctrine of the *Débats* was, in fact, at bottom, much the doctrine of the Hebrew prophets. The task of preaching it was attended by almost insurmountable difficulties. The censor was swift to punish and to suppress any independent expression of political opinion. So the leading articles in the first columns were models of discretion. The life of the journal passed into the "Varieties"—into studies on moral and social questions or purely literary articles, and the intelligent reader turned to the third page where he read, between the lines of an essay or a review, all that the political editor was obliged to leave unsaid. A notice by Prévost Paradol, a piece of Roman History by Cuvillier-Fleury, an article by Ernest Renan were sure, in their subtle opposition, of an attentive public.

It was easy for a philosopher to serve the Opposition simply by upholding the banner of an austere Ideal. The staff of the *Débats*, like the staff of the *Edinburgh Review*, was content to "cultivate Literature upon a little oatmeal." The traditions of the place were

all of a certain Jansenist severity. Luxury, display,—objects of elaborate mechanical construction, even,—were suspect in the eyes of the *Débats.* To own more than a million or so (of francs *bien entendu*) appeared in very poor taste. The immense expenses of the Empire, the impetus given to industry, the heightened standard of universal comfort, were signs of the times regarded as distinctly ominous by these eulogists of days gone by. They spoke of the improvements of the Baron Haussmann with a dash of contempt in a great deal of disfavour. "I would give all your steamboats for an Æneid," exclaimed M. de Sacy. The Government was as generous in public works as it was illiberal in public instruction. Vast sums were spent on the extension of railways, the establishment of the telegraph, on industrial exhibitions, on the organisation of savings banks. "There was some good in the Empire after all!" cry we of a later date, as we read the formidable list of Imperial improvements. "No good!" cried the stern young prophet of the *Débats.* "What material progress can compensate a moral decadence? Will a steam traction engine make a man happy? Will a universal exhibition make him nobler or better? In taking the triumphs of mechanical ingenuity for the sign of an ad-

vanced civilisation, you mistake the mere accident for the essential." So taught Renan in France throughout the Fifties; while, curiously enough, in England, John Ruskin was fulminating a similar gospel against the gross, the palpable, ideal of the age.

Renan discredited the advantages of tyranny, and showed how despotism, to make itself acceptable, invariably persuades Society of its talents as a steward: "Bow down before me, and I will give ye cent for cent." But what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Nothing is less important than prosperity. Man is not born to be prosperous, but to realise, in a little vanguard of chosen spirits, an ideal superior to the ideal of yesterday. The bulk of humanity lives by proxy; only the few can attain a complete development. Millions live and die in order to produce a rare *élite*. The true glory of Holland, for instance, is to have brought forth princes like William of Orange, painters like Rembrandt, thinkers like Spinoza—not to have the best pastures in Europe and a high standard of comfort. Once we put the accent on prosperity, we introduce into our midst envy, ambition, and all their baleful sequel. The really noble society is that in which each man is content with the station into which he is born. The really noble

nation is that which yields the greatest sum of disinterestedness, of self-sacrifice, that in which men most live for one another: the society whose workmen are proud of the magnificence of their prince, whose princes are solicitous for the needs of the poor, whose laymen are sustained by the prayers of the nun, whose priests rejoice in the courage of the soldier, whose scholars profit by the labours of the humble, whose harvesters feel that, in their sphere, they too collaborate in the great moral masterpiece which is a nation firmly welded in an indestructible solidarity of soul. Duty is the foundation of such a society, and the satisfaction in duty accomplished the private joy of every citizen—a joy deeper than any man can owe to the mere diffusion of material abundance.

So runs the epistle of Renan to his contemporaries. In consequence of the storm raised by his essay on the historians of Jesus, published in the *Etudes d'Histoire Religieuse*, he had turned for a while from his chosen path of religious history to the neighbouring track of moral philosophy. The frivolity of the society of his age made him pause in the destruction of an illusion which was, perhaps, a restraint and an ideal. The morality of the average man is in fact generally a consequence of his piety; let us therefore respect that piety. Let us direct it. Whether or no

Christianity be true, this philosopher was persuaded of the existence of good and evil.

"An impenetrable veil screens from us the secret of this strange world whose reality convinces and oppresses us. Philosophy and Science pursue for ever, and ever in vain, the formula of this proteus whom no reason limits and no tongue expresses. But there is one indubitable foundation, which scepticism shall not shake, where man may find, until the end of time, a foothold firm amid the uncertainties around him: Good is good, evil is evil."

Good is good, evil is evil, and, above all things, truth is truth:—"Whatever system we adopt to explain man and the world, we cannot deny that the problems they arouse are infinitely curious, infinitely attaching, and worthy of the most patient investigation. And even if virtue were but a snare, laid for the noblest, if hope were a dream, beauty an illusion, humanity a vain tumult, the pure research of truth would still preserve its charm! For even if we suppose the world to be the nightmare of a fevered divinity, or an accidental bubble on the surface of nothingness, yet are we invincibly impelled to wring its secret from it. Whatever we may think of the universe, it remains a spectacle which rivets our attention. In the life of St Thomas Aquinas we read that one

day Christ appeared to him and asked him what reward he craved for his learned writings. 'Nothing but Thee, O Lord!' replied the angelical doctor. The critic of the universe is yet more disinterested. If Truth should appear and address him a like question, he would answer—'Nought but the pursuit of thee, O Truth!'"[1]

[1] *Essais de Morale et de Critique*, p. 100.

CHAPTER V

MARRIAGE

A PORTRAIT by Henry Scheffer—the less known brother of a famous painter—shows us Renan at this time. The head is certainly idealized, but its likeness to the sitter's charming daughter forbids us to call it a piece of flattery pure and simple. It shows a Renan strikingly unlike the gnome-like figure, the colossal leonine head, the radiant ugliness of the affable Academician we remember. Neither the strength, nor the humour, nor the disenchanted benignant smile we knew are here. This is a serious elegiac young man, a Hamlet,—nay, too gentle and unsuspicious for a Hamlet,—almost a Good Shepherd. The cheeks and jaw have not yet taken on those formidable proportions which made the sinuous lips appear yet more delicate. All the features are larger, the heavy nose, the mouth, especially the eyes—charming, in this portrait, in their smiling melancholy. The oval of the face appears not only slighter but longer. The *ensemble*

is striking, touching, even handsome. The relentless idealism of the painter has attenuated the quaint awkwardness of the model, whose small stature, heavy sloping shoulders, huge head, and short arms can never have presented this distinguished appearance. Renan was well aware of his deficiencies. Many a line in his earlier essays informs us of his bashfulness in society. His priest's education and the long habit of solitude had left him awkward, silent, reserved. He could discourse brilliantly on elevated subjects, but he did not know how, at the right moment, to say the usual thing. He was always utterly devoid of the give-and-take of the ready talker. Thus he oscillated between an inspired monologue and a heavy silence, while he wondered how intelligent persons could be so fired by the common-place, "so interested in what does not ennoble." He felt painfully his uncouth exterior, and perhaps still more painfully, though with a certain pride, that mark of the priest on his forehead, which, as he thought, was clearly legible, destining him to eternal solitude in the pursuit of the ideal. Sir M. Grant Duff, who met him first in 1859, gives us a more flattered version of the same character:—

"His manner had that charming gentleness which is characteristic of the best of the Catholic clergy. His conversation was very copious and

limpid, not dealing much in epigram or anecdote, but very easy and very informing."

It was towards 1855, I think, that Renan made the acquaintance of Ary Scheffer. The pure idealism of the Dutch painter's art, the liberality of his religious feeling, the generous and lofty temper of his mind, were such as to fire the young *savant's* enthusiasm. By his new friend's hearth, he found that household warmth, that simple and yet intellectual geniality which were all that was needed to thaw his chill timidities. M. Scheffer's house had not been the home it became to Ernest Renan were there no women by the hearth. He had a niece and a daughter. Some thirty-five years later I was privileged to count the former among my dearest friends.

When I knew her Madame Renan was an ageing woman, her figure grown to a great size, the shape of her face something altered by the habit of difficult breathing: she had a heart complaint. But, at sixty, her bright blue eyes, with their look of witty innocence, her clear skin, her abundant chestnut hair, her delightful smile with its winning unassailable youth, sufficed to remind us of the attractions of her girlhood. Her early portraits show a slim light grace, a pure oval of cheek and brow, with the same air of merry goodness which made her face so charming in age.

As clever as she was pretty, as kind as she was wise, the friends of her girlhood used to call her Minerva; but imagine the most modest, the most amiable fireside divinity, prescient for others, wise with no thought of her own advancement. Lively, gay, active, sweet-tempered, capable, discreet,—Cornélie Scheffer was the ideal helpmate. Really gifted, she soon discovered the intellectual superiority of her uncle's friend. Imagine his delight to find this charming maiden, not only acquainted, but deeply imbued, with his own writings, and able to talk with him not merely as an admirer, but as an intelligent companion. Little by little her influence on her new friend became only second to that of Henriette, and inclined him ever more and more to the standpoint of the artist, of the man of feeling, as opposed to the pure scholar's point of view. I suppose M. Ary Scheffer saw how things were drifting. Often Madame Renan has told me of a ride she took with her uncle on the sands near Scheveningen—I suppose in the autumn of 1855. They were talking of the future—of other people's future. Suddenly he wheeled round his horse, confronted her, and said—"You, my dear, you ought to marry the most intelligent man I know." Neither said any more; they broke into a gallop, and continued their thoughts in silence.

But Mademoiselle Renan, in her dear seclusion, laid no great stress on this intimacy with the Scheffers. Long before she had proposed to Ernest what she had considered a suitable alliance. He had refused; the years glided on; and the tender, jealous sister, so happy in her double solitude, had come to count upon her brother as exclusively her own for ever. He, on the other hand, relied on her sympathy for a confession which his reserve continually put off. And one day he awoke to find himself condemned to break the heart of one of the two women he loved best in all the world.

In pages of a penetrating beauty, Ernest Renan himself has told the heart-wrung modest tragedy. Who shall repeat the words which a sacred emotion has let escape from the lips of a master? Henriette Renan could not, would not, at first accept the bitter cup. And one day her brother, forced to choose between two affections, decided for that which seemed most like a duty. He bade farewell, an eternal farewell, to the young girl he loved. At night-fall, he went home; entered quietly the little study, henceforth desolate, and told his sister of his sacrifice. Thus set face to face with a generosity superior to her own, all that was noble, all that was the infallible protectress, revived in Henriette and forbade the

sacrifice. The next morning early she went to M. Scheffer's house; asked for her young rival, sought and found her peace. The two women wept long in each other's arms; but they bid each other *au revoir!* with glad faces. In those hours of shaken tears their sisterhood had begun.

But not yet, if ever, was the demon of tender jealousy allayed. The first years of Madame Renan's married life were filled with a difficult and tormented happiness. The young wife, brought up with all the triple liberty of a cosmopolitan, Protestant, and artistic home, must often have felt the provincial reclusion of the Renans' house weigh upon her spirits. For she was not mistress there. The Minerva of Ary Scheffer's studio never complained of the subordinate position allotted her by her own conventual hearth. Her husband, accustomed all his life long to look up to Henriette and obey her, thought it quite natural that his young wife should obey her too. And the exquisite, the devoted, the noble Henriette was sometimes a jealous divinity.

The birth of a son lit a warmer glow at their fireside. Henriette adored her nephew, and this great new interest reconciled her to her brother's marriage. Melancholy, tearful, anxious, she remained; ever susceptible, easily wounded; but a real affection for Ary's mother knit her at last

to her sister-in-law. In 1860 they were still closer drawn together by the loss of a little girl, Ernestine, passionately beloved by her father, who consecrated to this baby soul an exquisite *In Memoriam*, still unpublished.—Little Ernestine, who lived nine months, was never forgotten;—often has Madame Renan recalled to me a loss still recent to her faithful love; and Henriette Renan in her last illness spoke many a time to Ernest of their "little flower."—Meanwhile old Madame Renan had joined the family circle. The witty, voluble little old woman had much more in common with her daughter-in-law than with her daughter. At heart, she had never forgiven Henriette her plain face; and she, at least, knew the value of youth, charm, beauty, and vivacity in a woman. Her presence made things go smoothly. Her son adored her, admired her, no less than in the old days at Tréguier. Every afternoon at dusk he was wont to spend an hour in her room, lit only by the gas lamps in the street. And she would discourse to him of Tréguier and Lannion as they were before the Revolution, of her own early youth, and of a vanished Brittany. More than twenty years later, these talks in the twilight were to receive an immortal setting in Renan's *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*

In 1858 Ary Scheffer died, and Renan lost in him not only a near related friend but a collaborator. Ary Scheffer's last design had been made to illustrate his nephew-in-law's translation of the *Book of Job.* The volume appeared, without the promised illustrations, in 1859. And thus Renan began his version of the Bible, choosing by a sort of instinct the great hymn of doubt and despair, the terrible dialogue between an irresponsible God who mocks at justice, and a baffled and ignorant humanity. In the following year he brought forth his second book—"The Song of Songs," the triumphant pæan of Profane Love. More than twenty years later, he was to give us *Ecclesiastes*, the last word of scepticism, the last ironical smile-and-sigh of the pessimist convinced that man shall never triumph over fate. Strange scriptures these. In the Bible, according to Ernest Renan, there is neither a prayer nor a psalm. Renan's translation of *The Song of Songs* is a masterpiece of ingenious scholarship, and one may say that only those who have read this charming version can appreciate all the beauty, freshness, and candour of the exquisite little Hebrew morality-play.

In 1857 Quatremère had died, and since then there was a Chair vacant at the College of France—the Chair of Hebrew and Syro-

Chaldaic languages — the place which Renan had desired consistently, and to which every succeeding volume showed his title clearer.

The Professors of the College of France are named by the Minister of Public Instruction from two lists, the one drawn up by the College itself, the other by the Academy of Inscriptions. These lists are almost always identical. Certainly the name of Ernest Renan would have headed either. But month after month, year after year, dragged on; the Chair of Hebrew remained vacant; the Minister never asked for the lists. The Professorship of Hebrew at the College of France is, in point of fact, a Chair of Biblical exegesis. The Catholic party, all-powerful in the first years of the Spanish Empress's influence, had devised this means of reducing a renegade to silence. Renan waited, and continued his duties as one of the sub-librarians at the Bibliothèque Impériale. He knew his time would come. When, in 1861, overtures were made to him, to discover if he would accept another Chair at the College of France, he replied, No. He meant yet to fill the seat of Quatremère.

CHAPTER VI

A MISSION TO PHŒNICIA

MEANWHILE the Empire prospered and became mellower in its prosperity. The laurels of the Crimea hid, in some measure, the blood stains of the Deux-Décembre. Men began to speak well of a Government which secured a triumph abroad and magnificence at home. When Napoleon III. declared war against Austria in favour of Italian independence, the usurper appeared the champion of liberty, and the popular enthusiasm knew no bounds. And, in fact, at heart, Louis-Napoleon, curious of all things, convinced of none, inclined as much to democracy as to any other popular idol. Like one of those late Roman Emperors, in whose private oratory there was a place for Isis and a place for Abraham, his eclectic mind gave a fragmentary worship to the idea of Freedom. Personally, he was liberal in his views, though a wave of conservative opinion had brought him to the throne. But while he began to disassociate influence from the tyranny of his Ministers,

he kept them in power. He attempted to realise democratic projects by the aid of the repressers of '48. He and his Government pulled in different directions—the tension reassured him: in that way he was sure of not going too far.

On the 15th August 1859, the Emperor proclaimed a general amnesty for all political offences. Of the six thousand exiles of December, many refused the Emperor's pardon.

> "Si l'on n'est plus que mille, eh bien! j'en suis. Si même
> Ils ne sont plus que cent, je brave encor Sylla!
> S'il en demeure dix, je serai le dixième
> Et s'il n'en reste qu'un, je serai celui-là!"

So sang Victor Hugo, and many took up the echo. Others were dead in banishment, but many returned. Nothing succeeds like success, as we all know, and the empire appeared a great success. One after the other, great names began to slip from the ranks of the Liberals and to appear on the horizon of the Court. Soon genius became a frequent guest at Compiègne. The Emperor's marriage had drawn Mérimée into his circle; Sainte-Beuve, Nisard, Gautier, Emile Augier followed suit. And the Empire, in admitting these great men, was modified by their influence, became eager to patronise art and letters, to further the pursuits of Science. The Emperor himself was a sort of a scholar,

a kind of an author, a hanger-on of Clio. Hesitatingly, doubtfully, though he still clung to his guides of yesterday, he began to follow, with one step back for every two steps forward, the brilliant phalanx that showed a better way.

Curious, indulgent, Renan watched this new departure with a sort of benign amusement, but made no advances. He, at least, never changed his political position. Liberal in 1848, Liberal in 1851, he was no less Liberal in 1860, when Liberalism had become a sort of fashion. Yet, when in the month of May 1860, the Emperor made a feeble advance to the man he had injured, offered to send him on an archæological mission to Phœnicia, Renan immediately accepted. Some of his old friends wondered. "The feud between the Government and the intellect of France was then so bitter that many persons of great merit would not have accepted even a scientific mission at its hands;" so Sir M. Grant Duff has well observed. Renan had no such scruple. Henriette, moreover, urged him to undertake an expedition which implied no political adherence to the Government, no personal advancement,—which took him from what still remained the scene of his ambitions, merely to further the gain of Science. And it was arranged that she

should accompany him as secretary, as accountant, as steward of his resources.

The arrangements for their departure were not yet completed when the Druses fell on the Christians of Mount Lebanon, and massacred them in a Holy War. The Second Empire, however illiberal at home, was more than generous in its foreign policy. Napoleon immediately decided to protect the unfortunate Maronites. The vessel which carried M. Renan and his sister to Beyrouth was one of those which transported a French division to Syria. Renan, in his candid absorption in the ends of Science, appears to have accepted the whole affair—massacres, Turkish incapacity, French army *partant pour la Syrie*, &c.,—as providentially combined in the interests of archæology: "The presence of our soldiers on the spot was a most favourable element in my design. Thereby my excavations were singularly simplified—they were made by the soldiers. Thus my mission to Phœnicia took that place in the Syrian Expedition, which the French army, in its noble preoccupation with the things of the mind, has ever loved to accord to Science in her more distant ventures."[1]

The blood of the Maronites was scarcely dry on the sand when the Renans reached the Syrian

[1] *Mission de Phénicie*, Ière Livraison, p. 2.

shore. Thus they saw the East at once in the squalor and horror of Moslem misrule, and in all the glory of its past. They landed at Beyrouth, and at once began their excavations at Byblos. Ancient Phœnicia, as the reader may remember, comprised that strip of Syrian coast —some thirty miles wide at largest, but nearly thrice as long—which runs between the Mediterranean shore and the range of Lebanon. There stand Azad and Marath, Tyre and Sidon, the Byblos of Adonis—memorable names! Ports, whence the Canaanitish traders put forth to carry cedarwood to Solomon, and purple from Tyre, and, from Sidon, the famous wares of Artas the glassmaker; ports whence they sped to Greece, Spain, Africa, Italy, founding Carthage, founding Cadiz, building harbours and stations until they made the Mediterranean a mere Phœnician lake. In their boats, with their bales, these hardy traders carried knowledge: but for their alphabet, where were all our science? But in art these English of the East were less happy. Colossal, irregular, impressive, their strange dome of Amrit, guarded by its lions, is almost their only masterpiece. For the best part, their monuments are a half-barbaric reminiscence of Egypt or of Greece, coarsely wrought, overloaded by plaques of metal ornament.

If the sarcophagi which the Renans unearthed at Byblos, showed no happy marvel of design—if they were but honourable examples of provincial art roughly executed in the best materials,—at least they afforded a singular pleasure to their excavators. Brother and sister had never dreamed of a life so free. Here they sat, on this beautiful border of the Holy Land, commanding their little camp, discovering the secret of antiquity. Care and poverty had dogged their youth: for Ernest the dull hours of the usher, or the dusty fatigues of the sub-librarian; for Henriette, exile and dependence amid plain after plain of sand and snow, endless forests of foreign pines. And now, united, the great cities of Phœnicia lay at their feet, and over the last blue mountain rim, Palestine! A new energy, a light of youth, animated them both. Henriette, the recluse of the Val-de-Grace, would spend ten hours at a stretch on horseback, nor speak of fatigue.

The autumn in Syria is long and full of charm. All the rocks of the gorges of Lebanon are wreathed with cyclamen. The plains towards Amrit are blue and red with flowers. From the heights of the mountains, which rise here, tier upon tier, in a quadruple range, the eye glances across chasms and forests, towards a sea more brilliant than the freshest blossoms. Cascades

and torrents, clear as crystal, cool as ice, leap from their rocky sources, and dash down the sun-baked mountain-side, filling the hot air with the sparkle of their spray. A spectacle so extraordinary forced itself upon the long slow gaze of Renan. His unremarking eyes at last observed the vision of natural beauty, absorbed it, retained it. Syria completed the work begun by Italy: Renan was henceforth to be one of the subtlest, one of the profoundest painters of nature. Rousseau himself has not more exquisite tints on his palette. And, like Jean-Jacques, he reproduces less a landscape than his own dream of a landscape floating in some pellucid haze of sentiment through which reality takes on a prestige more magical, an air of mystery and remoteness, peculiar less to the landscape than the seer.

The climate, though beautiful, is unhealthy in its brusque alternances of heat and cold. Sometimes sudden gusts of neuralgia, terrible, appalling to witness, would sweep over Henriette Renan, lay her prostrate for some hours, or some days, and she would rise up again with unabated courage and resume their hard, happy, adventurous life. Seated squarely on her horse, she skirted the precipices of Lebanon, and never paled. Rough fare, the huts of the mountain for shelter, constant transitions from the burning

sunshine to the sepulchral chill of the gorges in shadow, were but as welcome episodes in a continual pleasure. At Tyre, the high pavilion she occupied was rocked by the winds. The spectacle of their little camp, lost in the desert, filled her at night with a religious exaltation.

In January 1861, Madame Ernest Renan came out to join them. Together they set out in the spring for Palestine. Often at night, their tent set under the shadow of Mount Carmel, or by the deep hollow of the Lake of Galilee, the travellers read the series of Pilgrims' Psalms, which Renan was to recall a few months later in writing the *Life of Jesus.*

"For those provincial families the journey to Jerusalem was a solemnity full of sweetness. Psalm after psalm records the happiness of these pilgrim households travelling together in the spring time over hill and down dale, with the sacred splendour of Jerusalem at the journey's end. 'How happy are brethren who dwell together in amity!' . . . The last stage of all, Aïn-el-Haramié, is full of charm and melancholy. Few impressions rival that of the traveller who sets his camp there at nightfall. The valley is narrow and sombre; a dark water drips from the walls of the rocks, pierced with tombs. It is, I think, the 'Vale of Tears'—the 'gorge of

dripping waters,' which is celebrated in the exquisite 84th Psalm as one of the stations on the way, and in which the tender sadness of mediæval mysticism saw an image of the life of man. Early on the morrow the caravan will reach Jerusalem. Even to-day the thought reanimates the caravan, renders the evening short and the travellers' slumber light."

Jerusalem, tragic, arid, barren, seemed then as the law after the Gospel, as the letter after the spirit, and sharpened by contrast the souvenir of Galilean grace. In this harsh environment, the newness, the freshness, the divine originality of the New Testament appear more apparent still. Ever since his year of spiritual crisis Renan had pondered in his heart a Life of Jesus, unlike any yet written, which, while hiding nothing of the textual errors and apocryphs of the Gospel as we possess it, should set in high and clear relief the divine character, the exquisite inventions in moral sentiment of the Founder of Christianity. Here, in the Holy Land, that great figure never ceased upon his inner vision. No saint in his cell, no Crusader, was ever more fervently haunted by Christ Jesus than this unfrocked Churchman, this sceptical archæologist, busied with the details of a scientific mission. In the desolate Galilee of a Moslem rule, his mind's eye noted the

flowery Paradise described by Josephus where the walnut and the date palm grew together. On the abandoned lake, with its one ruined ferry-boat, he saw the sails of Andrew and Peter, the prosperous fishermen of old. On the little promontories, overgrown with tamarisk and oleander, he followed the trace of the very footsteps of the Son of Man. Far to the north the ravines of Mount Hermon are drawn in dazzling silver against the sky. The horizon, at least, has not altered in these two thousand years.

After the month of May the heat in Syria becomes oppressive. Galilee, deforested, deserted, is now so naked that the caravan reckons over-night where it shall find a spot of shade for the mid-day meal on the morrow. The journey back to Beyrouth cost the travellers much fatigue. Mme. Ernest Renan, *enceinte*, re-turned to France in the course of July. Her husband and sister-in-law would have done well to accompany her. Almost every member of the mission engaged under M. Renan in the excavations had already fallen dangerously ill with pestilential malaria. And the worst heat of the summer was to come. But the sense of scientific duty, always so strong in Renan, which over and over again prompted him to a

course of action disastrous to his interests, urged him to remain on the parched and feverish Syrian coast in order to supervise the shipping of his archæological treasure, in order, also, to complete his exploration of the upper range of Lebanon. He meditated, even, an autumn excursion to Cyprus. Henriette happier, she declared, than ever she had been in her life, Henriette, satisfied to find herself still indispensable to her idol, remained with him and braved — alas too courageously! — the exhalations of a Syrian autumn.

The implacable sun of Beyrouth drove the Renans to the hills. At Ghazir they found green pastures, fresh snow from the mountains, wholesome springs, and a little house with a pergola. Here, in the utmost peace conceivable on earth, Renan began his Life of Jesus. All day long he sat in the cool shadow of his Syrian home absorbed, intoxicated by that inner dream which little by little took shape and lived before his eyes. A New Testament, a Josephus, comprised his library; but the book of the East was open before him; but the very past, familiar through a hundred texts and inscriptions, rose before him more real than the actual moment. Thrown full length on his Syrian rug, his books and papers scattered round him, he wrote hour

after hour in the fervour of a veritable inspiration. Henriette was his perpetual confidant, as soon as the page was written she copied it fair. When at last the night fell, the clear, magnificent Oriental night, brother and sister rose and sought their terrace on the house roof. There they would speak at last of the day's silent work, and she would make her reflections, often profound, always pregnant with that fine, moral tact of which she had the secret. "Many of them," her brother has said, "were to me as veritable revelations."

"This book," she would say, "I shall love. Because we have done it together. And because I like it!"

Days of earnest thought, nights of dreaming scarcely less fecund. When, in the first days of September, the Renans were compelled to return to Beyrouth the book was three parts written, and Christ on the eve of the last journey to Jerusalem.

Alas! the soul and the body have not the same requirements. An immense moral satisfaction had not preserved the health of Henriette Renan. The cruel neuralgia from which she suffered was perhaps even aggravated by so intense a nervous strain. Yet had the *Cato* started at the date fixed, the sea winds and the air of home

might even yet have revived her. As chance would have it, some ill-hap delayed the ship one week. Made aware of this postponement, the Renans started for Gebeil (Byblos), in order to see to the shipping of two last sarcophagi, which they had given up as untransportable. They secured their spoil, and climbed the hill to find shade and rest at Amschit, that Syrian village, dear to Henriette, where they had spent together the first few weeks of their Eastern sojourn. Here, on the Tuesday, 17th September, Henriette fell ill with a vague sort of intermittent fever, accompanied by neuralgic pains. But she was so accustomed to neuralgia! She had often seemed more violently ill. Even on the Wednesday, the surgeon of the *Cato* saw no reason for anxiety. When Ernest Renan could be spared from the wharves of Gebeil, he sat at her side, she uncomplaining, he undisquieted, and continued the work they had both so deep at heart. He had reached the chapters of the Passion. But on the Thursday he too fell ill with the same mysterious disease, turn by turn mortal and trivial, which seizes on the victim, and looses him again, as a cat plays with a mouse. Unhappily the surgeon of the *Cato* always arrived when his patients were in their languid intervals of remittance. He did not know the pernicious

malaria of the Syrian coast. He foresaw no serious consequences. But on Saturday morning M. Renan, when he dragged himself from his couch in the sitting-room to his sister's side, meaning to work beside her at his *Life of Jesus*, was terrified by a new feature of the malady —the heart appeared affected. He dispatched a brief note to the surgeon of the *Cato.* He had time to remark the Maronite peasants passing his window on their way to church, and in this foreign half-savage country, the familiar sight filled him with a feeling of utter desolation and helplessness which he has since recorded. Then he himself fell down unconscious among his scattered books and papers.

When, at nightfall, the French doctor arrived at Amschit, he found brother and sister, both apparently dead, laid out upon the carpet of the little *salon*, watched over by Antoun, their Syrian man-servant. The ship surgeon, dumb-foundered by this strange neuralgia, apparently of an irregular, fatal sort, retreated hastily to Beyrouth in search of more experienced advice. Later in the day the French commandant and the French doctors, seriously alarmed, climbed the steep road to Amschit. When they arrived, the unconscious bodies of Ernest and Henriette Renan had been transported from their rooms to

the large reception-room of Zakhia, their wealthy Maronite host. There they lay, stretched out on the floor, the family of the worthy Zakhia grouped around them, wailing them as dead. It was a scene of a poignant barbaric melancholy.

Henriette Renan never recovered consciousness. She died on the Tuesday morning. Her brother awoke from his long swoon about an hour before she expired. But he awoke to a troubled dream of things, clearly aware of nothing; and Henriette died without his hand in hers. For days after he babbled of green fields, imagining that he was resting with his sister by the springs of the river Adonis, under the great walnuts that stand above the waterfall. She was seated beside him in the deep grass; he held to her lips a cup of ice-cold water. When he stirred in his dream it was to ask, "How is my sister?" They answered, "Very ill!" He smiled, and fell again to dreaming. When at last they said, "She is dead," he barely understood. No merciful silence was possible, for the *Cato* was waiting in harbour, and so soon as the invalid could bear the journey, he was put in a litter and carried seaward. Henriette he left behind him. She sleeps in the vault of Zakhia, under the palms of Amschit; distant, in death as in life, from the Breton land she loved so well.

As a dream within a dream, there remained to haunt her brother the thought that Henriette had been spirited away from him alive, buried in the caverns of Lebanon while still in her living trance. For the likeness of that swoon to the last sleep filled him with fearful apprehensions, and he had never looked on Henriette's dead face. Even the presence of four French doctors at her deathbed could not entirely reassure him. And nearly twenty years after, in the *Dream of Leoline*, he speaks out this inner anguish: "Ah, see, her eyes open! Her long white hand moves out of the coffin. Her face is pale as of old, and her eyes swim in tears. Come, kiss me! Dear, I have so much to tell thee! How many years have passed since thy mortal fever. How weary thou must be with the long journey from thy grave. God knows that in all my joys I have never ceased to long for thy presence; not one happy moment but I would have shared it with thee! Ah, white shadow, open thine eyes, though it be for a quarter of an hour; only one quarter of an hour in which to weep with thee, and expiate my faults towards thee, or suffer thy pious reproaches. O, pierced heart, how hast thou made me suffer! For so many hours, bitter and sweet, give me at least a glance."

There is no grief so terrible as to feel that,

however innocently, we have abandoned our dearest in their hour of need. It is the grief of Peter. Renan never forgot that his sister died alone. For many years, she, at least, did not forsake him; for those whom we lose by death do not quit us all at once. All the company of true mourners may echo the words of Hippolytus, *μείζω βροτείας προσπεσὼν ὁμιλίας . . . κλύων μὲν αυδῆν, ὄμμα δ' οὐχ ὁρῶν τὸ σόν.* We feel an irresistible ægis above us. An inner presence is more penetrating and more intimate than we ever knew it, for the dead speak to us now from within. Our continual meditation on a vanished object recreates it in ourselves. We grow like the dead we adore; their spirit finds a home in us, and appears to use us and direct us at its will. But in the end our natural personality reasserts itself; only very few souls are transformed into the image they recall. Renan's character, so sensitive, so impressionable, had none the less a ground-work of singular *unmodifiableness;* even the kindred spirit of Henriette, so like his own, could not permanently change that stubborn essence. . . . Time passes; the dead remain as dear; but their influence pervades us less and less, shrinks gradually back to its own centre, leaves us—as the fields are left on the retiring of a flood—fertilized, no doubt, and richer, but the same as before, land and not

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water, ourselves and not another, for the rest of our time. . . . Even Love-in-Death cannot create a new spirit within us.

So great, however, was the influence of Henriette, that, for years afterwards, not only her brother acted as she would have bid him act, but—far rarer triumph of love!—he thought as she would have bid him think, in all seriousness, in all tenderness, with a remote and noble elevation—checking as they rose those impulses towards irony, towards frivolity, towards scepticism, which Henriette had not loved.

PART III

CHAPTER I

THE COLLEGE OF FRANCE

WITH half his heart in the mysterious kingdom of the dead, and himself still pallid with the reflection of that unseen world, Renan set himself to finish his *Life of Jesus*—the book which Henriette had loved, "because we wrote it together." Never had the problems of religion appeared so all-important in his eyes; never had he felt nearer to that infinite and eternal energy which beats at the heart of things: One in All. "The loss of my brave companion attached me closer than ever to studies which had cost so dear. . . . I have looked Death in the face. The pygmy cares which eat our lives away are henceforth meaningless to me. I have brought back from the threshold of the infinite a livelier faith than I ever knew in the superior reality of the world of the Ideal. It alone exists: the physical world appears to exist. . . . The older I grow, the dearer I have at heart the one problem which ever keeps its profound significance, its enchanting novelty. The Infinite sur-

rounds us, overlaps us, and haunts us. Bubbles on the surface of existence, we feel a mysterious kinship with our Father the Abyss. God is revealed, by no miracle, but in our hearts whence, as St Paul has said, an unutterable moaning goes up to Him without ceasing. And this sentiment of our obscure relationship to the universe, of our Divine descendance, graven in fire in every human heart, is the source of all virtue, the reason we love, and the one thing that makes our life worth living. Jesus is, in my eyes, the greatest of men, because He developed this dim feeling with an unprecedented, an unsurpassable power. His religion holds the secret of the future. . . . To transport religion beyond the supernatural —to separate the ever-triumphant cause of Faith from the vain forlorn hope of the Miraculous, is to render a service to them that believe. Religion is necessary—as eternal as poetry or love: Religion will survive the destruction of all her illusions. I say it with confidence: the day will come when I shall have the sympathy of really religious souls."[1]

Henriette had said: write the Life of Jesus. Henriette had also said: maintain your candidature to the Chair of Hebrew and accept no other chair. Behold, her least utterance had now

[1] *Questions Contemporaines*, 195 . . . 237 . . . 232 . . . 235.

become oracular. As Renan himself wrote to the Professors of the College of France :—" I saw an imperative revelation in the counsel of a beloved person who appeared to me haloed in the sacred aureole of death." Ah, why was Henriette not by his side! She would have bid him keep distinct these two noble ambitions—bid him speak of Jesus in his book, analyse Semitic philology at the College of France. But at bottom, for all his airs of indecision, Renan burned to give a reason for the faith that was in him.

At last, after nearly five years of silence, the Minister of Public Instruction demanded the lists from the College of France and the Academy of Inscriptions. Renan's name headed either. And a decree of the 11th January 1862, proclaimed him Professor of Hebrew at the College of France.

This election was passionately unpopular among the Catholics, and for due cause: the Chair of Hebrew being in fact a chair of Biblical criticism as we have said. But it was also, oddly enough, unpopular among the students of the Latin Quarter, indignant that Renan, *their* Renan, should have accepted office at the Emperor's hands. Was he going to turn his coat? At the mere idea they were all ready to shout with Robert Browning—

"Just for a handful of silver he left us."

It was clear there would be at his opening lecture what the Latin Quarter loves to call a *Chahut.* Renan's opinions were known. If the Church was conspicuous by her absence, the young Catholic party was there *en masse* to avenge her. And the Liberal students were no less suspicious and defiant. The University, not wholly sympathetic to this unfrocked Seminarist of supposed Radical opinions; the world of fashion, attracted by Renan's literary renown, helped to throng the hall. The lecturer appeared, his head in a dream, his mind full of Henriette, so cruelly absent, of the Life of Jesus, of his old dreams at last come true. He was barely aware of the various causes of offence which he had given. He just glanced at the amphitheatre crammed from floor to ceiling—at the students, clinging in clusters to the window ledges, shouting news of the lecture to the crowd, black in the street. . . . I have heard it all described so vividly that it seems to me I, too, was there!

Then he began a parallel between the Semite and the Aryan. Anti-semitism was not yet a fashion; there was nothing here to rail at. The face of the audience fell: was it this they had come out into the wilderness to hear? The lecturer continued — "The Political Idea is Aryan. The French Revolution, for in-

stance, may often have compromised Liberty, but" . . . (Here the Latin Quarter saw its opportunity.)

"Respect the Revolution, sir!" thundered from a hundred throats. A quarter of an hour later an audacious comparison of King David to an "energetic Captain of Adventure" threw a bomb into the Catholic camp. By this time the Liberal students were aware that the lecturer was still *their* leader; one and all they became forthwith his clamorous partisans. Their support alone rendered the delivery of the lecture possible.

Was it well? Better perhaps if, at the outset, an unjust turbulence had drowned the orator's voice. For one phrase in his speech — one sentence which nowadays any Liberal Christian would hear with tolerance, if not with approval — falling just at that impassioned moment on prejudiced ears, began a sequence of injustice, a series of misunderstandings, which were to make of the mild impartial scholar the notorious martyr of the Empire, the demigod of a Republic he only half approved. To this day, in his native place, Renan is chiefly remembered as "a great Republican" by those who have never read a line of his writings.

I can imagine Henriette's phantom murmuring—

"Ni cet excès d'honneur ni cette indignité!"

This was not the future she had foreseen, illustrious yet retired; the life of a Le Nain de Tillemont secluded in some park of Seine-et-Oise, whose peaceful *charmilles* are not too far from the libraries of Paris, whose lofty grey-panelled chambers afford space and quiet for a voluminous research. Such a life, irradiate with the limpid light of Science, productive of labours which should satisfy countless generations of scholars, and never be profaned by the vulgarity of fame, such a life she would approve. She would have found something gross in the immense celebrity which began, on that 21st of February 1862, in the amphitheatre of the College of France.

What a riot! what a tumult! Only here and there we catch a word, half drowned in hisses and acclamations. . . . "An incomparable Man, whom some, struck by His exceptional mission, call a God . . . victim of His ideal . . . deified in His death . . . founded the Eternal Religion of Humanity. . . . No man before Him had reached so high a standard of perfection. . . . For the time is come when ye shall worship

Me no longer along this mountain nor at Jerusalem, but in Spirit and in Truth."[1]

St Paul did not disdain to say: "Jesus of Nazareth, a Man sent from God unto ye" (Acts ii. 22). Bossuet, after him, wrote without reproach of Christ as "a man of admirable mildness." But Renan's "homme incomparable" appeared the thrown gauntlet of the defiant apostate. The Church was not slow to take it up, nor the students to defend it; the confusion grew deafening. The lecture over, Renan escaped by some back way to the house of a friend, haunted by the dread of a public ovation. The piece was played without Hamlet; the students, *en masse*, swarmed to the Rue Madame, where the Renans lived, and (true Frenchmen!) demanded, in default of their idol, a glimpse of his mother. M. Egger, who was calling at the time, harangued the crowd in terms sufficiently vague to disguise from the old lady (a devotee of Throne and Altar) the full scandal of her son's success. He need not have been at the pains. The dark, witty old face had only its most benignant smile for the turbulence of Ernest's riotous champions.

The fact remained that M. Renan's opening

[1] *Mélanges d'Histoire et de Voyages*, p. 18.

lecture had disturbed the cause of public order. Beset by the Church, by the Empress, Napoleon seized this excuse to suspend the young Professor from his functions. And Renan continued his lectures in his private study, still, nominally, Professor at the College of France. But on the 2nd of June 1864, on opening the morning paper, he saw his name. He was transferred from his chair at the College of France to a post of sub-librarian at the Imperial Library. The thing came on him as a thunder-clap. And insult was added to the injury by an official note, observing that this new appointment was more in accordance with the dignity of a distinguished *savant*, "at present subject to the anomaly of receiving pay for work which he is not permitted to perform." Renan had acquitted himself of his duty, exactly, if in private. The fund of combativeness which every man has at heart seethed within him. He wrote to the minister, in a mood of ferocious irony: *Pecunia tua tecum sit.* He refused the post of librarian, and maintained his right to the title of Professor at the College of France.

On the 11th of June Renan was officially deprived of his chair. He became one of the most popular members of Liberal Opposition. Already,

in 1863, he had been invited to stand for Parliament. In March of that year he wrote to Michele Amari.[1]

"I am preparing my *Life of Jesus*, which will appear in about two months. I need not tell you on what lines it is written. The partisans of miracles will not be satisfied. I do not know what will come of it all! Between you and me, I may say that if I should be deprived of my chair at the College of France, it is probable I may be elected as one of the Members for Paris. I cannot say that I am in love with the idea. I should have preferred the free and peaceable career of Higher Education. But it is not my fault if my feet are set on another road. And, if my election take place, it would have a meaning which would fill me with satisfaction; to bring about such a declaration, I am ready for many sacrifices. All these things may be! I am playing a difficult game and I do not see the upshot."

The *Life of Jesus* appeared on the 23rd of June 1863. Before November, sixty thousand copies of it were in circulation. No such success had as yet issued from the printing presses of the century. . . . At such a moment, there was something fitting in the destitution of Ernest

[1] *Carteggio di Michele Amari*, 2 vols., Turin, 1896.

Renan. The professor had become the artist; the philologist, the man of letters; the scholar, the politician. Too much glory, too wide an audience, ill befit the patient research of a laboratory.

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF JESUS

THE *Life of Jesus* is naturally the first of Renan's seven volumes on the Origins of Christianity. Even more than its successors it is a work, not of erudition, not of technical exegesis, but of moral and psychological enquiry, based on historical documents. Renan was certainly familiar with the curious mosaic of Le Nain de Tillemont, he knew almost by heart the New Testament, he had read and re-read the pages of Josephus; to this foundation, solid if restricted, he added a rare archæological capacity, an acquaintance with the monuments, moneys, and inscriptions of the first centuries of our era which, of a surety, no other religious historian possesses; he was, moreover, a traveller, whom a year's residence in Syria had accustomed to the horizons, the races, and the character of the Holy Land: the fresh impressions of his visit colour every page; but, above all, he was a psychologist, a man who had once believed, who had felt the pulse of his soul, with as much curiosity as

anguish, during the long years in which that dear belief expired: a man to whom, even after its death, the impulse of Faith remained the holiest, and the most interesting thing in the universe. His rustic and religious origin enabled this man of science to enter into the spirit of a credulous country folk, and to analyse, without illusion, without derision, the creative process of their minds. The result is a master-piece. The pure idyll of Galilee, hardly less sacred to Renan than to the most fervent Churchman; the Passion of Jerusalem; the religious East; and philosophic Greece, animating a Syrian people with the spirit of the Gospel of St John; the dogmatic force and fervour of St Paul, supplying, as it were, channels and imperishable aqueducts for the New Source of Life which the rod of Jesus had set welling; all the great concourse of saints, martyrs, mystics, heretics, and charlatans who laboured together blindly in a Cause superior to even the noblest among them; and the cruel consolidating force of persecution; and Nero, the Antichrist, throwing into stronger relief the ideal perfection of Jesus: all this, grouped against a vast Mediterranean background—Syria, Antioch, Alexandria, Athens, Rome—lives and glows before us in the pages of Renan.

In the beginning there was a Life of unequalled

perfection. The origins of Christianity begin with the Life of Jesus. To write a *Life of Jesus* has been the fatality of modern theology, for the hero of a biography can only be a man. The Christ, who, at a given date, was born of Jewish stock, in the obscure village of a distant Roman protectorate; who grew to manhood among certain Syrian peasants, whose appearance, education, and racial character he shared; who spoke an Aramean dialect, and never knew Greek; loses, by just so much as he gains in historic precision, the vague glory of universal Divinity. The theologian who would write the life of Jesus should compose a hymn. In such matters the Trisagion alone is really orthodox.

So early as 1838, Salvador, and towards 1860, Bunsen, had published, in their different fashions, material towards a history of the early Church. In 1840, Littré's translation of Strauss's *Life of Jesus* acquainted the French public with the speculations of Tübingen. More than to any of these, Renan owed to Herder: Herder, whose philosophy of history had helped to mould his mind. That elegant philosopher, Christian archæologist, and philologist, fully alive to the literary excellence of the text he examines,—that man of feeling and ideas, in-

fluenced by his age and largely influencing it,—was a man after Renan's heart. He never understood the austere and hard-headed rationalists of the school of Tübingen, as deficient in tact and measure as they are rich in knowledge.

Renan's debt to Tübingen has been exaggerated. The fault and the charm of his *Life of Jesus* is that he wrote it insufficiently prepared. The charm—because its extraordinary spontaneity makes the book a sort of fifth Gospel—the gospel, if you will, according to Thomas Didymus. The pages written on the mud floor of a Syrian cottage, with Josephus and the Gospels for their only sponsors, keep the freshness, the life and the beauty of their original inspiration. Renan's *Life of Jesus* is the biography of a divinity written by a worshipper still prostrate before the dead body of his god, but convinced there will be no resurrection. Its superiority is its profound religious sentiment, its living, vibrating atmosphere of the East, its sense of the human personality, the *life* of Jesus.

Strauss, on the other hand, is a gnostic of the nineteenth century. All that he touches turns to allegory, myth, and symbol. His Christ is an Æon—a glittering abstraction. The aureole which the faith of the multitude has lit around the face of Jesus blinds him to the

features which it frames. His Saviour is a logical deduction from prophecy. We wonder why the first Christians lived hard, and died harder, for love of so unreal a Messiah. There is no life in these dead bones. The dogmatic man of science has no sense of a thing so delicate, so fluctuating, so spontaneous, so mysterious, as the birth of a faith.

But only a German university can produce the sum of labour necessary to collect, control, revise and criticise the vast material of any given history. If, when he began his *Life of Jesus*, Renan had been better acquainted with the researches of Strauss, Baur, Hilgenfeld, Reuss, Schwegler, Ewald, Zeller, and other erudites, he would not have taken a document of, we suppose, the end of the first century for a contemporary narrative of the life of Christ. A characteristic preference for ideas over facts, an affinity for the man who philosophises about events rather than for him who simply records them, led Renan to lay the greatest stress on the Gospel according to St John. Later on he saw the error of his ways, and, with the good faith he always showed, he recast many passages of his original work: after the thirteenth edition the difference is striking. But something undecided, embarrassed, clings to the work, which I consider inferior to at least

three of the volumes which were to follow it—the exquisite *Apostles*, so humane and so tender in its feeling of human brotherhood; *St Paul*, a study in sociology and in the psychology of geography; *Antichrist*, a magnificent historical painting. The *Life of Jesus* contains incomparable passages, but the whole does not carry conviction. This Christ is too Celtic, too German; he is too much like Ernest Renan. And the writer's attitude is not clear. He is not a Catholic, so much is evident since he denies the divinity of Christ; but he is also not a free-thinker, a disinterested historical student; for his Christ is more than the founder of a great religion, he is something quite apart from, quite above and beyond such human sons of God as Moses, Mahomet, or Buddha. Renan will none of them. "Christianity," he declares, "has become almost the synonym of religion; all that is attempted outside its great and fertile tradition is doomed to sterility. . . . Christ is the creator of the eternal religion of humanity." This is limiting the future. The divine essence has more than one manifestation, and in the million years of man's progress may reveal itself in many ways. On the lips of an unbeliever, so absolute an affirmation is more than incongruous—even a little

exasperating. And occasionally Renan reminds us of some inconsolable widower who, after the stormiest married life, waxes eloquent of the departed. If the marriage was so impossible, why these tears? But if the poor man be sincere, he will not listen to you.

Renan was sincere, and in the things of the heart there is no magic like sincerity. So heart-felt, so hopeless, his pious unbelief took the world by storm. For the world is full of men and women who once believed, and who keep green and strown with flowers the tomb of a dead ideal. Here was a man who could speak the dumb word in their hearts; a man whose lips the Eternal had touched with his fiery coal; a man who cried no more, as we all cry—*â â domine, nescio loqui!* Genius was in the book, and sincerity, and a very tender reverence. As the Empress said to Madame Cornu, in great surprise, when at last she had read the maligned volume: "It can do no harm to believers; to unbelievers it can only do good."

The most beautiful pages of the *Life of Jesus* open the succeeding volume, the *Apostles*, and treat of the life-after-death of our Lord. We doubt if there exist in any language more exquisite pages of religious psychology. Here,

again, it is, from the historical point of view, unfortunate that Renan should have followed the narrative according to St John. As was often the case, the artist in him tempted the historian, and the historian yielded. For the version of St John is infinitely more pathetic, more probable, more lovely than the versions of the synoptic Gospels. And doubtless the narrative was inspired by an authentic oral tradition. But, in a question of history, a scientific historian has no right to choose a page, however beautiful, of a later writer, in place of a prosaic narrative copied from a lost recital possibly contemporary with the event described. If Renan had been, as single-mindedly as he believed the sole servant of Truth, he would have chosen Mark or Luke for his guide in this matter.

But if we may question Renan's judgment in the criticism of his texts, we can only marvel at the extraordinary ingenuity with which he interprets them. With all the piety of the Christian, with all the scruple of the man of science, he gives an explanation of the Resurrection which leaves no least suspicion of fraud to blur the aureole of our dearest saints, and yet sets an event, which we cannot accept as supernatural, in accordance with the normal laws of

things. The vision of Mary Magdalene accomplished the necessary miracle—Christ had arisen. "In these crises of the miraculous. it is easy enough to see what another has seen. The one merit is to see before the others, for those that come after model their vision on the received type. It is the peculiarity of fine organisations to see promptly, exactly, and in the true line of things. The glory of the Resurrection belongs to Mary Magdalene. After Jesus, she, more than any other, laid the foundations of Christianity. The shadow which her delicate senses perceived—nay, created—still shelters the world. Queen and patroness of idealists, she knew, as no other has known, how to affirm her own ideal, and to force upon others the sacred vision of her passionate soul. Her great woman's assertion, 'He is risen!' is the basis of the faith of Humanity."

Beauty of the fabric, fragility of the foundation, necessity of the consoling vision, fleeting illusion of all things save the infinitely small which we measure in the hollow of our hand! And who shall say which, in the essential is truest: Life which is a dream, or the dream which may be Life? All here below is but a sign and a symbol, the sun in the heavens no less than the phantom

of desire. The symbols which serve to give a form to the religious sentiment are incomplete and transitory; but a great truth inhabits them and makes of the least of them the temple of an hour.

CHAPTER III

THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

CHRISTIANITY is not a simple faith; it is a profound theology, a tremendous organisation. The Son of Man appeared, loved the world and died, leaving a trail of light behind him. His message is contained in the discourses of Matthew, in the parables of Luke. But a pure religion is too ethereal a thing to subsist uncontaminate in the dense atmosphere of reality. The work of Jesus was taken up and completed by a man of action. And this is what Renan shows us in his volume on St Paul.

His portrait of the Apostle is striking, life-like, unexpected. For hitherto, in all the great images which he loves to evoke from the recesses of the past, Renan has sought some secret kinship with his own soul. Here there is none! St Paul is scarce a saint, not at all a poet, a sage, a dreamer, or a man of science. He was a hero of the Active Life—a missionary and a conqueror, with

a fierce, tender, proselytizing soul, not averse to combat, often susceptible, sometimes jealous, capable of rancour and aggression. For once Renan has got outside himself. He calls up before us the bizarre little Jew with his halting speech, his incorrect and hurried eloquence, his bent shoulders, his pale face with the large features, his piercing eyes under their shaggy eyebrows. The vision is so vivid that we scarce have the heart to cavil at the insufficient tradition which is its only warrant : the same tradition maintains that St Paul was remarkable for his personal beauty.

St Paul, as we know, was a Pharisee and a man of some education. The fact that he spoke with fluency a Greek dialect was all-important in the propagation of Christianity, for Greek was the chief language of the Mediterranean ports, and a mere Hebrew missionary, confined to his own tongue, would have been of scant influence with the Gentiles. Paul, a Jew by birth, a Roman citizen by hereditary right, a Greek by language, was no less cosmopolitan than the world he moved in—the brilliant, variegated, incoherent world of Asia Minor : Splendid Antioch, "third city of the globe," with its temples, baths, and aqueducts, its wide streets bordered with stately columns and statues ; immense Ephesus clamber-

ing from the marshes up the sacred hills, with the shrine of Diana in its midst, and all round the clear horizons of the Asiatic plain; Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, vast centres of wealth and superstition, cities full of magicians and miners and flute-players, of goldsmiths and courtezans, of priests, rhetoricians, and novelists: such were the unlikely cradles of the New Idea. Renan who, in 1864, visited the whole area of the peregrinations of St Paul, has fixed with the subtlest, most vivid art, the very image of this vanished world.

"Like Socialism now-a-days, Christianity sprouted on what we call the corruption of great cities." It was a movement of the hard-pressed, intelligent, unlettered poor, who abounded in the meaner suburbs of the Mediterranean ports.

There the wandering Christian workman set up his tent, there he sowed the good seed, and then passed on. Like a travelling journeyman who leaves behind him the trace of his opinion in every wayside tavern where he has halted, in every village where he has made friends, Paul, in especial, wandered from place to place, tramping over hill or down dale, coasting from port to port, working for his bread, even while he set forth how man does not live by bread alone. At Ephesus

and Corinth, assisted by Aquila and Priscilla, he set up, in some back street, a small shop for the sale of the coarse Cilician canvas which it was his trade to weave. In every town where he halted he gained converts to the Faith. Christianity was to spring in all her glory from these small clusters of fervid, illiterate, primitive persons, grouped, as a rule, round some virtuous well-to-do widow, some spiritually-minded tradesman of means. The Early Churches were narrow circles of some dozen believers. "Probably all the converts of St Paul did not number a thousand all told."

Renan's rare knowledge of the social conditions of antiquity on the Mediterranean shore has enabled him to reconstruct the double organization which was to contain Christianity, even as the hive and the wax contain the honey. The outer framework, as we may say, was the compact *Orbis* of the Roman Empire. One sole administration governed all the countries visited by the Apostles. Their propaganda would have been impossible had Asia, Macedonia, Malta, the cities of Greece and Italy, each been constituted in separate and vivacious nationalities, each with their own exclusive tradition, faith, and speech. But the Pax Romana enveloped them all in one monotony. A great dull well-being

brooded over the vast Empire: the tedium of a civilization which has attained its goal and has nothing left to desire.

"If life consisted in amusing oneself by order of the Law, in eating one's ration of daily bread, in taking the regulation pleasure sadly under the eye of one's chief, then the Roman juris consults would have solved the problem of human government." But a mortal coldness breathed from this dismal prosperity: Rome offered nothing to love! Deep in man's heart is the instinct of choice. The phalanstery, however comfortable, is not the home, nor the chance desk-fellow the selected comrade. He longs for the little coterie of chosen spirits, the guild the confraternity, where he contributes, of his own free will, to the welfare of his mates and his own security. The sense of fellowship is an instinct which must be allowed for! In the lowest circles of the Roman Empire men met together in secret to satisfy this sacred prompting. The Syrian, Greek, and Jewish quarters were full of little illicit *Collegia*—Friendly Societies, Mutual Aid Societies, Burial Societies especially—condemned by the Government as possible hot-beds of disaffection, but in reality peaceful enough in their humble brotherhood. The members were all of the poorest class·

servants, porters, hucksters, old-clo' men, tinder sellers and such like. Christianity immediately illuminated the small *Collegia.*

And what was the ghetto but a larger, a more complete *Collegium?* A *Collegium* whose life and centre was the Synagogue? No gulf, no apparent schism, as yet divided Christianity from the Law and the prophets. The first apostles sought their quarters in the ghetto. There they awaited patiently the Sabbath day, and then followed the crowding Israelites into the square, plain structure which was less a church than a school, a debating society. It was the hospitable custom of Jewry to invite the stranger within its gates to greet the brethren with some discourse of edification. Paul and the apostles found thus their opportunity. In the Synagogue they preached the Gospel. In the Synagogue they made their first converts. In the Synagogue they aroused their earliest persecutors.

For no people are (or *were*) so well instructed as the Jews in the authentic dogma and tradition of their own religion. Paul's audacious theories roused a dozen eager voices, clamouring to confute the heretic. Hence stonings, flagellations, prison, exile. But hence also the instantaneous bruiting abroad of Christian doctrine. The

complicated ritual of Judaism was perhaps a safeguard, it was certainly a barrier. It is impossible to imagine the world accepting a creed overcharged by so many observances. Paul proclaimed: "The Letter kills, the Spirit maketh alive." By declaring of no account the distinctions between the clean and the unclean, he admitted the Gentiles to the Faith, but he outraged Judaism. In every religion there are always more men ready to avenge a violated ritual than to accept the new life of a free spirit. Judaism, as a body, was lost to Christianity. But in exchange it gained the world. Instead of a sect of the ghetto, it became the purest worship of the civilization it renewed.

Therein was the merit of Paul. By his passionate affirmation of the broad freedom of Christ he completed and secured the work of Jesus. The history of his struggle at tremendous odds; the sunny, breezy, joyous narration of his divine Odyssey; the picture of the social conditions under which he laboured, is the subject of Renan's two volumes, *The Apostles*, and *St Paul*. Seldom has the master shown a science more solid, a profounder sense of the secret roots of things, a more vivid and brilliant vocation of their living image,

than in this volume which, dealing with documents and facts beyond dispute, contains nothing to grieve the liberal Christian, much to instruct the student, and, more to rejoice the lover of literature.

CHAPTER IV

POLITICS

NOT for a moment was Renan's weighty mind thrown out of gear by the prodigious success of the *Life of Jesus.* He was aware that an author's popularity is almost always the result of a misunderstanding. He liked being liked, no doubt, as much as St Augustine "loved to love." Popularity was a pleasant episode. He would not let it become an aim.

Had he continued the "Origins of Christianity" in a *crescendo* of anti-clericalism, Renan would have become the idol of the market-place. He would have been to 1870 what Lamartine had been to 1848: the *vates*, the philosopher, the chosen guide. But the unity and the dignity of Renan's life sprang from his sense of belonging to a superior order vowed to superior duties: he was the priest of Truth. Instead of contesting a Parisian circonscription, he went to Asia Minor with his wife and studied on the spot, as minutely as he had studied the civilization of Palestine and Syria, the local conditions into which were born

the Christian churches. Then he came home and continued the *Origins of Christianity* in a mood of absolute abstraction from the passions of the hour.

The *Apostles* appeared in 1866, *St Paul* in 1869. Renan looked up from his task at the world about him, and saw that the soul of France was disquieted within her. At heart he was still a priest, a man set apart, elect, a member of a moral aristocracy,—and *therefore* responsible for the errors of his inferiors. To-day, as in 1843, he thought :—

"A private life would be my happiness ; but such a life appears to me tainted by selfishness. I ought to be a priest ; for the priest is the depositary both of wisdom and good counsel ; the man of study, the man of meditation, and yet a very brother to his brethren."[1]

Renan, so far at least, was no sceptic, no mere *dilettante* indifferent to mankind. He had the tenderest sense of fraternity, the most absolute sense of the efficacy of the Ideal ; there was balm in Gilead still ! If he believed it impossible, and perhaps unnecessary, to admit the multitude into the arcana of that temple wherein he was a servant, he accepted none the less, and indeed all the more, the claim which the ignorance

[1] *Lettres Intimes*, p. 118.

of the laity laid upon him in their hours of perplexity and error. It is a mistake to say, as I have heard it said, that Renan was an ambitious man—that he desired to govern his inferiors, and to impose the triumph of his own ideas. But it is less of a mistake, I maintain, than to imagine him, as the main public of France imagines him, an idle dreamer in his ivory tower. He was, in fact, a conscientious leader of humanity, sometimes misguided, ever willing to seek a better way.

France in 1869 had reached a high degree of material prosperity. Napoleon III. had taught the French how rich they were. But the seeing eye could read the threat of disaster in the shifty brilliance of the hour. All the roots of France were exhausted in the production of one beautiful, sterile orchid,—Paris. The provinces were sapped, drained, lifeless; neither country gentry, nor county boards, nor local interests, supplied the provincial with an existence of his own. As France only bloomed in Paris, so Paris flowered in the Court: a fast, frivolous, superficial, spendthrift Court of tinsel soldiers, of reckless beauties, of brilliant authors: a world of little theatres and universal exhibitions, of Baron Haussmanns and Cora Pearls. It was clearly time that the order of things should change.

The General Election came round in May 1869. It was then that the Liberal Opposition asked Renan to stand for Meaux. At some sacrifice of time and fortune he consented. The gods must have smiled to see Ernest Renan go a-canvassing among the wealthy corn-growers, the rich butter-merchants and cheese-mongers of the plains of Brie. Brie, by nature of its proximity to Paris, is Radical, anti-clerical, and prosperous: it sells its wares to the Capital, and takes, in exchange, some tint of Parisian ideas: but it is a Radicalism fat with grass and grain, fed to bursting with rich milk and the flesh of kine: the Radicalism of the peasant landlord: the most illiberal opinion of any party.

The vast plains were one shimmering ocean of pale green, with last year's great ricks stranded here and there, like ships, among the unbounded corn, when Ernest Renan traversed them in the spring of '69. What can he have said to the influential voters who inhabit these solid farms? How they must have astonished each other, he and they? I can imagine a conversation something after this fashion:—

Farmer of Brie.—"Good morning, Mister. You support the Liberal programme?"

M. Renan.—"Yes, on the whole. . . . We can indeed imagine a superior social order in

which the individual would be remorselessly—perhaps, indeed, willingly—sacrificed in order to promote, in a few, the acquisition of some yet undreamed-of good. But France appears irrevocably devoted to Liberty, to the happiness of the mass, to a small, prosperous, somewhat vulgar, affluence."

F. of B.—"Well, well! And you will vote for the extension of the Board Schools?"

M. Renan.—"Certainly! If Science be the chief good, what right have we to debar our brother from it? And yet, I own, I deplore the abolition of the unlettered class, charming in its rural simplicity, shrewd with a mother-wit of its own, the faithful depositary of the ideas and fancies of our remotest forefathers. The peasant, the priest, and the noble are the only loveable classes! The Board Schools will replace the peasant by a pretentious, ill-bred, self-made rustic, infinitely more dangerous to Science, and probably hopelessly unfitted for the sphere into which he is born. The School Board will be the ruin of a superior ideal. But let Justice be accomplished! Yes, yes, my friend, I shall vote for the School Board."

F. of B.—(Does the man think me an ass?) "And the taxes? At least, you are firm for cutting down the taxes?"

M. Renan.—" In part. It is certain that, in the whole cause of history, nothing has ever rendered a government so unpopular as excessive taxation. And yet! a tax, rightly regarded, is a form of disinterestedness, a way of participating in the real life of the world. Our poor selfish aims —all the criss-cross of rival activities which make up the struggle for our daily bread,—are as nought in the sight of the Eternal! Our personal ambitions, our thousand little strifes, successes, and reverses are all, as we may say, consumed in the wear and tear of the universe: every day supplies the fuel of every day. But the little fund of reserve force which makes the world go round is the devotion which we willingly give to an end outside ourselves, distilled, drop by drop, from millions of selfish lives. Nothing is so vain, so imbecile, as selfishness: beware of selfishness! Sometimes, I confess, I see the future of earth as a planet of idiots, each basking in his own particular ray, indifferent to all outside his well-sunned limbs. Selfishness is the curse of great material prosperity. And it may be that, in this vast sunlit sheet of springing corn before us, in all this panorama of grain and kine, of earth and river, the one thing which *really* exists is the tax which each yields of its increase for the general weal of the nation."

F. of B.—"Dang it, the man's gone daft! Good morning, Mister!"

On one point, at least, M. Renan and his constituency were as one. All his electioneering bills bore in flaming letters—"No War. No Revolution. A War would be as disastrous as a Revolution." The Prussians may still have read them on the village walls round Meaux. And on this theme M. Renan was never too eloquent to please his hearers. He had then, as always, the most brilliant success as a speaker. His wit, his astonishing naturalness, the originality and the fundamental good sense of his paradoxes, the charm of his manner, his air of enjoying the ideas with which the occasion inspired him, made him irresistible as an orator. And, at bottom, his hearers and he were of a like opinion—at least as to the prospect of war. Among the peasants of Brie there reigned, in 1869, the most complete indifference to military glory. They had a certain honest respect for freedom, but at bottom all that they asked was that the Préfet should meddle as little as possible in their affairs, that the taxes should be diminished, that the term of military service—which took so many strong young arms from the harvest—should be shortened as much as possible. All that they asked was to be left free to make their own for-

tunes out of their own fields in their own way. M. Renan looked in some wonder at these persons incapable of a sacrifice, incapable of a general idea. He found the farmer of Brie *un être borné.* He wondered at this thriving rustic, "content in his gross and trivial comfort without a thought in his head." M. Jules Simon used to say that, when asked if he would vote with his party, M. Renan was wont to muse, and to reply, at last :—Sometimes ! But though he must have appeared an extraordinary politician, Renan's reputation was immense; probably his eccentricities were taken as the hall mark of his genius. The Minister of the Interior took great pains over this affair, and it was not without a struggle that Ernest Renan was defeated for the constituency of Meaux.

The tendency of the elections as a whole was distinctly Liberal. The Empire itself at last, and especially the Emperor, had absorbed a great deal of the Liberal theory, and gave out as much liberty, or thereabouts, as France at that moment could assimilate without excess. *L'Empire Libéral* sought to repair its wrongs towards Ernest Renan: already in the spring of 1870, there was some talk of reinstating him in his Chair of Hebrew at the College of France. True, the affair was only completed under the Ministry of Jules Simon, on the 17th November, after

the fall of the Empire; but the first steps towards Renan's rehabilitation were taken six months before that catastrophe. And, in fact, Renan had accepted the Liberal Empire. It was part of his theory that progress comes not by leaps and bounds, but little by little: that out of chaos comes misrule, and out of misrule gradually a better order. He would have accepted the chair of Quatremère as a Liberal victory, infinitely more important than the defeat of Meaux.

Much in the spirit of a Merovingian Bishop,—who, unable to chase the barbarians from Gaul, should set himself to civilize them,—Renan not uncheerfully assumed the moral education of the Empire. He had no doubt of its stability; he had touched as it were with his hands the wealth, the solidity, the love of peace, of rural France. The Government was certainly bad; but a system which encouraged the endowment of research could surely not be wholly corrupt. On the 8th of May 1870, seven and a half millions of Frenchmen declared themselves satisfied with *L'Empire Libéral.* Brilliant and hollow beyond example, France appeared destined to show that a nation can flourish merely by the excessive animation of its surface, as if a man, having coughed up all his lungs, should live on

by the extraordinary breathing power of his skin.

Such health is deceptive. The Emperor himself was not deceived. The Empress said: unless we have a war, my son will not come to the throne. By a second act of high treason, by a second *Coup d'Etat*, more culpable and more disastrous even than the first, on the 19th July 1870, the Emperor declared war against Germany. Renan was at Tromsöe, in the far North of Norway, in company with the Prince Jérome-Napoléon, as innocent of apprehension as himself. "What a crime, what a fit of stark, staring madness!" he wrote to Sir Mountstuart Grant Duff.[1] "I had thought the danger of war waived for years, perhaps for ever. . . . The greatest heartache of my life followed the opening of that fatal telegram."

[1] *Sir M. G. Duff, Ernest Renan*, p. 81.

CHAPTER V

THE WAR—RENAN AS PROPHET

RENAN hastened home and joined his family at the small house near Sèvres, where he was accustomed to spend the summer. From the first he knew what to expect. A formidable discipline, an organised force at the service of a great idea, had come into contact with an incoherent mass of martial vanity and irresponsible impulse. Electrified by the mere hallucination of Napoleon's ghost, France was doomed to defeat; and, in his prophetic vision, Renan wept her defeat in tears of blood, for she suffered it at the hands of his ideal.

All his life he had dreamed of uniting France and Germany. He saw them lead the United States of Europe in the van of civilization—the one passionately alive to all that is generous, liberal, or lovely; the other proud in her hereditary strength of science and authority. Together they might head the world; and now . . . !

Behold, the nation to which Renan owed all that was best in him—the nation of Gœthe, Herder, Kant—revealed itself as a rout of drunken troopers setting fire to Bazeilles! The brutal Bavarian, the plundering Swabian, the blustering Prussian, *these* were the teachers whom he had ever held up as patterns of morality and culture! No man in France, we may fairly say, suffered more in that hour than Ernest Renan; for the Franco-German war was to him as a civil war, and he saw his two countries closed in a murderous struggle.

Admirable in his freedom from party passion, Renan never let go his hold on the general relation of things. After Bazeilles, after Sedan, in the midst of his cruel experience of the hard and arbitrary spirit of Prussia, Renan still saw unobscured the ideal Germany which had formed his mind. His country in flames, the Prussians in sight of Paris, his own little house at Sèvres pillaged by his divinities, left him still convinced. Behind this evident mass of drill-sergeants, quarter-masters, heroes, and scoundrels—Goths alike—there existed none the less a superior order, an invisible senate of philosophers, men of science, scholars, jurists (men of action also), working together in the service of humanity. *These* were really Germany; and Germany being

the most adequate expression of reason, would listen to reason.

While the Prussians were taking up their positions at Versailles and St Cloud, Renan sat down and wrote to David Strauss an open letter denouncing the war as a crime against civilization, pleading against the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine as a blunder in history, for Germany has need of France as an ally against the growing strength of Russia. The letter is eloquent and noble. All through it echoes that love of Europe which was Renan's true patriotism, that disinterested devotion to the future of humanity which is his peculiar glory. But, alas! when did prophet arrest the course of battle? Strauss chuckled in his beard, translated his ingenuous correspondent's pamphlet, and sold it for the profit of the Prussian ambulances; whilst, on the horizon, Germany wrote her answer in flames by the arson of St Cloud.

If Renan's attitude was a failure abroad, at home it was a scandal. Even his nearest friends deplored the prophet's madness. An exasperated patriotism contracted the nerves of France. It was not precisely the moment to speak of the chosen few, of that *élite* of reasonable humanity the wide world over—"Neither Greek nor Barbarian, neither German or Latin"—who from an

empyrean raised above the struggles of race and country, should remain undivided in their Olympian goodwill,[1] and direct the affairs of mankind. A line in Goncourt's *Journal*, — reported with the inevitable inexactitude resulting from the incapacity of a Goncourt to comprehend a Renan, yet undeniably precious — shows us the completeness of the misunderstanding between the idealist philosopher and a defeated nation :—

"Berthelot continued his distressing revelations. When he had done, I exclaimed, 'All is over! There is nothing left save to rear a generation to avenge us!' — 'No! no!' cried Renan, starting up, with his face aflame. 'No vengeance! Perish France, rather! Perish the idea of country! Higher still is the Kingdom of Duty and Reason!'—'No! no!' yelled the whole table, 'there is nothing above one's country —nothing!' By this time Renan had left his chair and was walking round and round the table with his shambling gait, waving his little arms in the air, and quoting aloud fragments of Holy Scripture, as he muttered, 'That's the essential!"[2]

Doubtless Isaiah appeared as odious, and no less

[1] Lettre à David Strauss, *Ref. Intellectuelle et Morale.*
[2] E. de Goncourt, *Journal*, 2nd série, 1st volume, p. 28.

grotesque, in the eyes of the Court of Jerusalem on more than one occasion.[1] Was not the reproach of old cast up against the prophets that they, sons of Israel, were friends of the Assyrian?

What is a prophet but a popular spokesman animated by the idea of God; inspired by the Spirit to protest against the dulness, the meanness, the cruelty or the iniquity of the times? Such, at least, and not mere visionaries and soothsayers, were the seers of Israel. Such, on his measure and degree, was Ernest Renan during the one difficult and heartbreaking year of the war. Exposed to the long agony of the siege, unpopular, without credit in the eyes of the violent factions which divided the country, Renan continued to preach his message, and to show the sacred hope of a future redeemed by the humiliations of the present. Repulsed by Germany, he sought to raise up France, to bind her sores, and renew a right spirit within her. Like his great forerunners, he called for a king in Israel; a king to impose on his people a new discipline and a new ideal, to build their foundations on wisdom, earnestness, submission, justice. "Democracy has no discipline, and no moral ideal to impose. Children, left to their own

[1] For instance, Isaiah viii.

devices, will not educate each other."[1] It may be that the only fruitful discipline comes from within, is not forced upon us from without, but so thought no longer the ex-Democrat of 1848. Germany still haunted him. He would fain have reconstituted France in the image of her conqueror, as a mighty kingdom, governed by a strong provincial aristocracy, kept in respect by the fear of the throne. "The victory of Germany was the victory of the man who is full of reverence, careful, attentive, methodical, over slapdash and hap-hazard. . . . It is the victory of Science and Reason. But it is also the victory of the feudal idea, the victory of the historic right of kings."

Such was not the mind of the French. There are two great tendencies in modern politics. The first, ever more and more predominant, is jealous above all of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, preoccupied by the rights of individuals and their liberty; and such, for a hundred years, has been the trend of Liberal France. The second establishes *à priori* a providential order, sacrifices hecatombs of individuals to the attainment of certain abstract aims, and is content if the sweat of a multitude permit the nobler lives of a chosen few, and so increase,

[1] *Réforme*, &c., p. 66.

little by little, the intellectual capital of the race. Which of these twain is the true end of humanity? We may not know. The obscure soul of the universe finds, perchance, its expression in either.

At least it is certain that, on the morrow of the war, Renan was convinced of the efficacy of the aristocratic ideal. Full of fervour, he presented himself at the elections of 1871. He was again rejected. He took his defeat to heart; the sense of his uselessness in the hour of need appears to have overwhelmed him. His desperate struggle with the impossible altered the natural gentleness of his nature. Condemned to look on, impotent, he beheld the most cruel of his fears come true. The Prussians were still round Paris when, on the 18th March, '71, the capital, delirious with famine fever, broke out into the Commune. The barricades were up in the streets; blood ran in rivers; all the old mad dreams and hopes and hallucinations of '48, all the atrocity of excessive reprisals, all the endless sequel of hate and wrong, rose, like bloody froth, to the surface of the troubled nation. Renan's heart broke then, I think. The lees of a harsh disgust for life shrivelled the lips that hitherto had only spoken golden words. Like Zachary, he abandoned Juda and Israel; both had betrayed

him. He shook the dust of the city from his feet; he broke in twain his shepherd's staff; and the name of the staff was Fraternity.

Beside the Thing that Is, beside the real fact—there exists the ideal fact, which ought to have taken place, but did not—

> "Look in my face—my name is Might-have-been."

Were I writing not a biography, but a study in absolute psychology—were I writing for a public which could not match an ideal truth with its obvious irrefutable counterpart—it is here, I confess, that I might place the end of Ernest Renan. Something died in him then; the Breton, I think. It is sure that in his despair he would fain have died altogether, knowing that it is sometimes well that one man should perish to redeem the people. "If ever I have wished to be a Senator, it was chiefly because I saw there a fair occasion for a violent death." Let us then imagine him, like his own Antistius, a victim to the strife of the ideal with base reality. In some Parisian street, full of March sunshine, riddled with shot and shell, behold him mounted on the great barricade of beams and flagstones. With the light of the Sacred Mount on his face, he delivers undismayed the message of a free spirit. But hark, a brief

explosion, a burst of flame and smoke! Struck at once in heart and head, slain by the splinter of a Prussian obus, and by a stone thrown by the people of Paris, the prophet falls. So might have ended Ernest Renan.

CHAPTER VI

THE ÉLITE

BUT Renan did not die. He merely took the train for Versailles, a disenchanted *émigré* of the Commune. It was the end of April. The stately Park of Le Nôtre was at its rarest,—a greenness in desolation, a hope in abandonment, such as perchance the world contains not elsewhere. All through the month of May, M. Renan wandered to and fro under the tender leaves of the stately alleys, beside the straight waters full of flowering weeds, where the gummy scent of the poplar is fresh on the air. There are few lonelier spots than may be discovered in that forsaken pleasure ground: Renan made it his habitual phrontisterion. Deprived of his books, separated from his work, he mused on the melancholy of human destiny. The old thoughts that, thirty years ago, he had revolved in endless meditations under the limes of Issy, visited him again. Fragments of Herder and Hegel and Malebranche rose to his lips. 'Twas

an endless conversation between the different lobes of his brain. An echo of this long lonely soliloquy has been preserved to us in the *Philosophic Dialogues.*

We appreciate the violence of a storm by the ravage which it leaves behind it. Compare this book with *St Paul* or *The Apostles*, and you have the measure of Renan's profound and embittered disappointment — a disappointment which embraced not his own country only but his enemy's, and the two main conceptions of human society; since the peaceful democracy of France appeared a Commune unchained, shooting its hostages; while the military aristocracy of Germany was revealed as a "handful of aristocrats, urging the placable populations to the slaughter." Neither these savage iconoclasts, nor those arrogant uhlans full of oaths, were fit to be the instruments of the Ideal. What was the future of society? How should the kingdom of God be brought to pass?

Like Boethius, composing in prison his Consolations of Philosophy, amid the ruins of his world; like Condorcet, writing his Progress of the Human Mind, in hiding during the Reign of Terror; Renan, from his avenue of Versailles, with Paris flaming on the horizon, sent forth his soul to seek a solution of this apparent

anarchy of things. His *Philosophic Dialogues* show a change of attitude rather than a change of mind—few of us change much at bottom after five-and-twenty. His old ideas still guide him:—

1. God does not proceed by special providences.

2. The universe fulfils, unconscious, a divine destiny with which, from the beginning, it was big.

3. One day, God, as yet inarticulate, shall come into conscious being.

4. Every disinterested effort makes for the little residue of excellence which, for ever accumulating, goes to shape the Divine Idea.

To these leading themes he adds two predominant *motifs*, not new in his philosophy, but developed out of all recognition. They are:—

5. The theory of the elect; and

6. The suggestion of Conditional Immortality; both of them, as a fact, an ingenious application of the Evolutionist Theory: the Survival of the Fittest.

In sight of the magnificent arson of Paris, Renan assumed it improbable that the Kingdom of God would arrive by Democracy. In a mood of bitter reaction he reiterates with emphasis a conviction which long had lain at the back of his mind, namely, that *the masses do*

not count, are a mere bulk of raw material out of which, drop by drop, the essence is extracted —the rare essence, the one thing needful, which, whether as Truth, Beauty, Self-sacrifice, or Genius, goes to make the Ideal. Wherefore, then, cumber ourselves with the education of the masses? Let them think as they please—*if* they think. What matter the opinions of millions of fools? Why trouble with difficult speculations the undeveloped brains which were not made to hold them? Is not the average man ephemeral as the May fly, here to-day, gone to-morrow without a trace, wholly eliminated from the Universe? Such as these are not born to know, are not born to have power, are not born to govern. But, alas, they are born to transgress, to revolt, born to immolate the Higher to the Lower, and continually to crucify their Redeemer. If not for their own sake, then for ours, and for the dim-descried and distant goal of things, let us put the masses within harness and drive them whither we will, well within bounds, kept under a yoke of gold and iron!

The peculiar pride of the priest rings in these theories, and still more in what follows, sinister with odd reminiscences of Inquisition racks and stakes. In an extraordinary symbol Renan imagines that the advance of Chemistry and

the arts of war may one day place in the hands of a superior order means, hitherto unimagined, of mastering the many. Plato also had dreamed of the Tyrant-Sage, the man who should unite political with philosophic authority.

"Unless those who govern States be serious philosophers the perfect State will never see the light," runs the theme of the Republic. "Authority must be confided to those who think little of authority, to men of science and philosophers pursuing a more than mortal aim." And the Athenian had already propounded a system of social selection by which the most gifted, most temperate, strongest and wisest of a nation should be raised from the body of the people into a superior caste, entrusted with supreme power. . . . The outburst of anarchy, of simple instincts, which defaced the end of the Franco-Prussian war, revealed how little power over a people has the small class of free, enlightened spirits. Renan looked on in a melancholy too deep for tears; and he too murmured—"Instinct would play the tyrant; we must find a stronger tyrant to put Instinct in chains." So he came to dream of his caste of Tyrant-Sages, having at their disposal an authentic Hell, "not without the limits of biology," the product of, as yet, un-

dreamed-of discoveries in Chemistry and Balistic Science. The philosopher then would not refute the barbarian, but annihilate him on the first threat of insurrection. Against such authority, after one or two unfortunate attempts, there could be no possibility of rebellion. An élite of intelligent beings would govern the world for good; and the whole force of Humanity, concentrated in a syndicate of demi-gods, would hasten the advent of perfect Reason. Sombre imaginings, unworthy of that liberal spirit! How should the world be saved by a false principle? Perish even the tyranny of the best! But the Reign of Terror of the Commune had jangled out of tune the sweet bells of Renan's harmony. For one moment of discord, he sought to meet injustice with its own arms and to attain a noble end by infamous means. The conception, harsh, false, profound, was worthy of the echo it found in the most singular brain of our time. The Prussian, Nietzsche, read of M. Renan's *Dævas* and dreamed of the *Uebermensch*, of the super-human master whose motto, worthy of Prussia, reads:—Might is Right.

As for us, we will hold rather (with Emerson) that the demi-gods must go ere God shall appear. Let us diffuse our light rather than concentre its life-giving rays. . . . Reflect, M. Renan, in what

peril you place the great age-long structures of Truth, Beauty, Wisdom, Civilization, by giving them too narrow a base. . . . Once I was talking to an eminent anarchist, a being kind and wise as M. Renan's *Dævas* :—

"We object to moderate fortunes," said he: "We admit millionaires. Our ideal would be the concentration of the wealth of the nation in a dozen pockets. . . . There would be only a dozen heads to fall." . . .

And ere now the Titans have fallen. The Tyrant-Sage might fall! Suppose that by some deep-plotted combination the mass should arise and murder the demi-gods in their sleep! Suppose that—owing, perhaps, to an imperfect sterilization of their instruments of torture—an epidemic should prevail among the *Dævas?* Science, Truth, Power, Civilization would disappear at one fell swoop! No, dream for dream, play for play, give us the pretty chimæra of '48: Let us ennoble the barbarians!

Meanwhile, dreaming not only of Hell but of Heaven, the sad philosopher tried to invent a less redoubtable compensation for Virtue and Wisdom. They do not meet their reward on earth. Lo, their homes are burned and pillaged, a cruel enemy slays their sons, and a brother arises to stab them from behind! Yet *in sinu*

meo est haec spes reposita: the just shall not perish! The Elect shall see God! Those who have contributed to the fund of the Universe their atom of disinterested thought or feeling shall receive, in exchange for the imperishable spark which they emit, a part in the eternity of the World-Soul. Eye hath not seen, tongue may not tell, how that due return shall be rendered unto them. But they shall be a part of the consciousness of the Over-Soul. And when the Divine shall become at last all-perfect and all-powerful, every particle of that unimaginable Being shall thrill, irradiate with life at once separate and blended, at once individual and general, at once a Soul and God.

PART IV

CHAPTER I

THE ANTICHRIST

IN this crisis of his life, Renan returned to his work with new ardour, disgusted with politics. The professional Discourager's is a melancholy business, and it is sad to be in the right against the illusions of one's country. Renan had tried to point out the reasons for the superiority of Prussia; he had tried to make his country accept a discipline and an ideal. He had worn, as it were, on his shoulders the yoke of Jeremiah;[1] he had sat on the temple-steps and cried to the people; but they had not listened. The task of his own life, after all, was the quest of Truth. Let Martha be busied with appearances: one thing alone is needful; and they who choose the better part sit in long contemplation at the feet of the Eternal Realities.

[1] See a remarkable conversation recorded in *Goncourt's Journal* under the date 18 April 1871. Renan says, in substance—"I am disgusted with the lack of courage of the Deputies of Paris. They should parade the streets and harangue the people group by group. If I had been elected I would have done so—had I worn on my shoulders the yoke of Jeremiah."

The German invasion, with its terrible sequels, had proved to our sage that brute force is still, alas, the mistress of the material world, leading it whither she listeth; that, in the conduct of events, the enlightened portion of humanity—the disciples of reason—have little influence, scant importance, and no true cohesion among themselves. A Mommsen, and a Strauss, and a Wagner, had each in turn revealed the soul of a Prussian corporal, and a view of practical politics quite unmodified by their proficiency in History, Philosophy, or Art. Europe was not yet in the hands of an international Elite. Renan sighed at the narrowness of broad minds, went into his study, and turned to the Past, since the Present would none of him.

His own mind was the broadest of his age, and therefore the least passionate. He was incapable of taking a side, accepting a limit to the laws of reason. If Truth spoke from the mouth of an opponent, he was eager with his unqualified assent. In his rare affirmations he never forgot that things have always their unseen side, which may possibly contradict all that we should predicate from those surfaces within our range of vision. For the human eye—and the mind's eye also—is so constructed that it cannot see every face of an object at the same time. Renan,

however, saw them so immediately one after the other, as in a series of rapid dissolving views, that his vision of things was never simple, but blended, as it were, from a set of contraries. No aspect of Truth engrossed him so entirely as to exclude an instinctive divination of its opposite. A sort of *contranitency*, — if we may use the word — an elastic reaction against pressure, which became the main quality of his mind, assured him that the truth of one thing does not necessarily establish the falsehood of its apparent negation. The air through which we all see the world is in fact a sort of vivid prism, iridescent, opalescent, only habit has dulled our sense of it. But Renan kept in his mind's eye unimpaired that intellectual iridescence which illuminates the inner vision. The truth of his most considered assertions is qualified with subtle reservations. And the unity of his mind, exceptionally sincere and veracious, is made of a thousand diversities in fusion, as a painter mixes his white from a medley of many colours.

Hence inherent contradictions: a love of giving himself the lie. Hence many a disconcerting strange *predella* painted underneath his sacred pictures. In no book is this so marked as in the book of these years: *The Antichrist*. He cannot contrast the terrible hieratic Christ of

the Apocalypse with the tender Elder Brother of the Gospel stories, but he exclaims: "Who knows? The image of the Gospel may be false. Jesus may have been the centre of a group more pedantic, more scholastic, nearer to the Scribes and Pharisees than the Evangelists would have us think." He cannot consider the obscurity which envelops the end of St Paul without reflecting that the convert may be converted more than once: the disenchanted saint may have passed over to the creed of Ecclesiastes and the Sceptics. Convinced that he had given his life for a dream, Paul may have wandered despairing, resigned, on some Iberian shore, aware of the nothingness of life. . . . . Then, in a twinkling, the ironic little transformation scene flashes out of sight, and leaves us face to face with a soberer vision of the Past.

None of these brief glimpses into the interior of a thinker's mind are so cruel as the sacrilegious page wherein Renan ascribes to Nero, tearing their last veils from the Virgin Martyrs in the arena, the invention of a new order of beauty: the supreme grace of Christian modesty. Such pages bear too clear the disfiguring hall-mark of the dilettante. In fact Renan, after 1871, retraversed more seriously the crisis which had menaced his moral health after the disasters of

1848. A second journey to Italy in 1875 led him again to the feet of his old enchantress, visible beauty—again he heard her whisper—

> "*Flecte ramos, arbor alta,*
> *Tensa laxa viscera,*
> *Et lentescat rigor ille*
> *Quem dedit nativitas.*"

The fourth volume of the *Origins of Christianity* is in some sense the masterpiece of the series. It is the record of the most memorable struggle between the hostile ideals of moral and material perfection, written at a time when that same struggle was a constant preoccupation of the author's spirit. In his profound disappointment with Life there were moments when Art, and Art only, seemed precious and imperishable in Renan's eyes; when the spiritual enthusiasm of arid Palestine appeared, after all, a poor thing to him compared with the divine and innocent grace of Attic beauty. He had given his life to the Holy Land, to the worship of holiness; there were hours when he half regretted that he had not offered it to Hellas. There are hours in most lives, perhaps, when that which creates and represents appears more satisfying, more positive, than that which suggests and inspires; when the frieze of the Parthenon

strikes us as more real than the shadow of the Cross on Calvary. And yet the Galilean conquers.

In the first century of Christianity, its history shifts gradually from Asia Minor to imperial Rome. Two Romes were soon in presence. St Paul in prison was weaving, no longer the coarse Cilician tissue of his loom, but the spiritual fabric of the future, while Nero, the circus rider, the æsthetic athlete, worshipped the art and the splendour of the decadent Greeks. How Renan makes us see them both: the prophet, illuminated by suffering; and Nero, "the poor young man," whose deplorable taste in Art had so unfortunate an effect on his morals; a mere *Tenorino* devoured by vanity, not wholly bad but wholly artificial, debased, of irritable nerves—and entrusted with the government of a world. No less vivid are the portraits of Titus and Vespasian: serious military men, a little provincial in tone and therefore all the more enslaved by the elderly graces of the aristocratic Berenice.

For life, brilliance, irony, force, this volume is unmatched. But we miss the moral charm, the rare deep fraternal kindness of St Paul and the Apostles.

"Perhaps our race alone[1] is capable of re-

[1] *The Antichrist*, p. 102.

alising virtue without faith, of blending hope and doubt inextricably together. An hour strikes in the life of European men of genius when they agree with Epicurus. . . . Whilst continuing their task with ardour, they feel a chill disrelish for life creep over them. Victorious, they wonder whether the cause for which they fought were worth so many sacrifices, and, whilst continuing to push the battle, many of them admit that wisdom begins on the day when they are content to contemplate Nature and enjoy her. There is, perhaps, scarce one self-sacrificing person, priest or nun, who, at fifty, has not deplored a vow which they continue to observe. A spice of scepticism appears to us integral in good breeding. We like to hear the just man say: 'Virtue, thou art but a name!' The essential quality of distinction is this faculty of soaring up and dominating our own beliefs, of rising superior to the cause for which we are content to give our lives, of smiling at our own most stringent effort. And we love our heroes the better when we watch them sink a moment by the roadside, aware of the vanity of absolute convictions."

What a disenchantment rings in these accents of crystal and silver! It is well, indeed, that advancing years should take from us something of

the substance of our personality—that we should grow wider, fainter, and, as it were, diaphanous: mere cobwebs to catch the grace of Heaven. But such a diminution of fibre as Renan shows us at this moment is nothing less than a moral malady. Let us not hold victory too cheap! Our heroes do well to be victorious, for they continue to live in their triumph; their dead hands mould and modify us from the other side the grave; their effort has shaped our future. And influence is a sort of immortality.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY: THE PHILOSOPHERS

THE incapacity to affirm does not imply the incapacity to choose and resolve. The least consistent in theory, in practice Renan was the most persistent of men. He followed his meandering paths to the very goal. He was willing to admit that all is vanity; but he acted as though nothing were so important as the finishing of the task he had found to his hand. His scepticism never paralyzed the continuity of his effort: a hermetic compartment separated his intelligence and his moral self.

Nil expedit . . . Laboremus! Our task is of no importance, yet give us, O Lord, our daily task! Vanity of Vanities! But let us finish the fifth and sixth volumes of the *Origins of Christianity!* . . . Without a lapse, without a pause, this solid and inveterate worker brought the considerable sequence to a close. As we have said, this great piece of history is also, in some sort, an autobiography. *The Anti-*

christ reflects Renan's discouragement, his dilettantism. The *Christian Church* and *Marcus Aurelius* show us a Renan reconciled with democracy, confident in the gradual ascent of man, aware that the greatest cataclysms do not really interrupt the imperceptible progress of the world.

Truths had a knack of flashing their contraries into the eyes of our philosopher. In the *Philosophic Dialogues* he had elaborated his doctrine of the *élite*, of a world saved by the tyranny of a privileged circle of adepts. And so, in the last volumes of the *Origins* he shows us the peril of an aristocracy of science, all the danger and the sterility of the oligarchic theory. For, at one moment, a chimerical, intellectual syndicate attempted to govern Christianity: the Church was only saved by breaking the yoke of the Gnostics. Rome and the world were entrusted, at one moment, to the rule of a philosopher and a saint: and Renan shows us the intimate miseries of the reign of a Marcus Aurelius. That wise emperor only succeeded in giving a veneer of hypocrisy to the evil forces which raged around him, and which he refused to recognise. May it not be that Stoicism and Gnosticism perished for lack of a public? That antiquity was misguided on seeking to specialise Truth and Virtue, in neglecting the education of the

lower classes! "I speak for one in a thousand," said Basilides; "the rest are dogs and swine." . . . "Suffer the little children to come unto me," said He who spake through the mouths of babes and sucklings. May it not be that the brain can not work without the pulse of the heart, that Wisdom cannot be nourished without the warm current of a live fraternity?

With the doctrine of the Gnostics, as mere doctrine, Renan had little fault to find. The metaphysics of Basilides forecast the main ideas of Hegel. His polytheistic cosmogony covers, but does not conceal, a philosophic system. . . . Life is the gradual development of a series of seeds or germs contained in the original matter of the Universe. Filiation is the great secret: each organism, abstract or concrete, produces its successor and dies. The sum of the aspiration of Humanity makes for righteousness. The recompense of the individual is Rest: complete absorption into the substance of Deity, a divine unconsciousness, a *μεγάλη ἄγνοια*. Man passes, but the Universe remains, and progresses. The Residue of Perfection is secured by the Frontier-Spirit. The Frontier-Spirit is a mystic interplanetary influence which carries the current of Being from the domain of pure spirit into the domain of pure matter, thus mingles either and

thus strengthens each. This free, starry secret of a life continually renewed, this Breath from Over-the-Border, this μεθόριον πνεῦμα, answers, in Renan's own philosophy, to the Spirit of Love. Renan could have no intellectual quarrel with the Gnostics.

What he feared and loathed in them was their sterile pride. Woe to the Truth which crystallises too soon! These thinkers, who imagined themselves to form a close syndicate of Truth for the sole use of the initiate, begat a vanity fatal to progress. Their wisdom was a system for solitaries. Had it endured it must have caused at last the establishment of a society not unlike the castes of India. The Gnostic Saint was already a Brahman *in posse*.

The Church fought tooth and nail against this hermetic aristocracy. For the Catholic ideal was the good of the masses; her holiest instinct to improve the average man whilst diminishing the sum of his sufferings. Her means were Faith and Works. She preached Hope in the Man of Sorrows, Trust in the Beyond. She needed no metaphysical system: the Primitive Church had little or no theology. It is certain that Jesus, and his immediate disciples, neglected that part of the human mind which desires to know.

In their house Science had no mansion. They

spoke to the heart, to the imagination, not to the mind. Christianity came not to satisfy our curiosity, but to console the unhappy, to stimulate the moral sense, to teach men to say "Our Father," to bind them together in a brotherly bond. In more things than one, the Church and Marcus Aurelius pursued the same ideal. But Christianity counted on the masses, the Stoic Philosophers upon the Few. As we know, the Galilean vanquished. And yet, after her victory, the Church was compelled to assimilate something of the principles she had conquered. You cannot say to the world at large, Be ye perfect! Christianity, in her turn, felt the necessity of an *élite*—of a Chosen Few set apart to practice a superior morality. Without diminishing the broad, general movement of her main current, Catholicism began to reserve, as in some peaceful backwater, the clearer, holier space of the conventual life. To the Monk and the Nun, it was said: Be ye perfect! And the average churchman, soiled with the dust of the world, struggled content, knowing that somewhere, out of sight, the Gospel was not preached in vain.

In demonstrating the secret of Christian influence Renan fell again, to some extent, under the charm which had ruled his early years. Not that ever again he was to say *Credo!* Faith

remained to him a fountain sealed, a garden enclosed—a garden at which one slants regretful glances from the sun-beaten steep highway. . . . It was the beauty of Catholicism which fascinated Ernest Renan, which appealed to his æsthetic faculty, which revived the souvenir of his pious youth. His mind still accepted a modified Pantheism as the most reasonable solution of the problem of the Infinite. But, more and more, his fancy harked back to the conception of a Providence exterior to the universe, of a sympathetic intimate spectator of the struggles of the soul. "Man is always more anthropomorphic than he thinks," said Goethe. As old age steals on, leaving our brain intact, nay, enriched by the experience and thought of our maturity, threatening the springs of life only, the craving for a continuation of our activity beyond the grave is natural to man. More than once the ex-pupil of St Sulpice will demand of the Unknown God some survival of the holier instincts of our nature, some possibility of progress after death. "Thou art too resigned, dear Master!" he cries to Marcus Aurelius[1]; "if it be true that even those among us who have lived in communion with Deity be extinguished for ever, then of a truth we have the right to complain. If this world have not

[1] *Marcus Aurelius*, p. 268.

its counterpart Beyond, how shall he who has sacrificed himself to Right and Truth die contented? No, such an one has the right to blaspheme! Heaven has taken advantage of his good faith. Why has Heaven implanted in his heart instincts of rectitude to which he falls a victim? Why should the ungodly triumph? Is it *he* after all who sees clear? If there be no Beyond, accursèd be the gods who place so ill their favours! . . . I am content that the Future remain an enigma. But if there be *no* Future, then this world of ours is a hideous trap for Virtue. Mind ye, I crave not the desire of the vulgar. What I ask is neither to witness the downfall of the ungodly, nor to enjoy the interest of my good behaviour. No selfish reward! Only to be, only to exist in relation to the light, only to continue the thought begun on earth. . . . To know more and more, to enjoy the truth at last, to behold the Triumph of the Good which I have loved!"

More than once at the close of his history of the *Origins of Christianity*, Renan asked himself, What should be the future of the Catholic Church? He saw one portion doomed to corruption, for the letter killeth. The Church will resist the gradual growth of Truth, will heap dogma on dogma, invent miracle after miracle. Lourdes and Tilly-sur-Seules will not save the

Church. No Papal Bull will make the sun stand still in heaven—*E pur si muove!* But there shall be a remnant. Abandoning the excesses of supernaturalism, Christianity once more shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The freer thought of Catholicism will find a new force in its combination with the Liberal forms of Protestantism, with enlightened Judaism, and Idealist Philosophy. From these shall spring a new Church which, in its turn, for its time, shall serve the progress of the Soul, no less abundantly, no less vitally, than those elder altars which it shall inevitably supersede.

CHAPTER III

SOUVENIRS

THERE comes an hour to all objective minds —too occupied with the world and its great problems to keep a constant register of their own sensations—an hour when they recognise that they are growing old. This revelation came to Ernest Renan in 1875, one twentieth of September, towards the evening, as he watched the dews thicken on the vineyards of Ischia, and the white sea deepen in tone as the light grew less intense. He was but two-and-fifty years of age. Rheumatism, not the weight of years, stiffened and impeded his gait, affected his heart, took the elasticity from his veins and muscles. He had grown old ten years too soon. With his habitual mild serenity, he recognised the fact without impatience—with a movement of thankfulness, rather, towards all the benign influences which had shaped his life. Even so, long ago, on the banks of the Grau, Marcus Aurelius had let his mind turn piously

towards the tutors of his early years. Renan, likewise, passed a happy hour in casting up his debt to each of these. That September evening he wrote but a few pages. The idea of writing some record of his childhood was born, however, into his reflective mind.

Five years later, M. Quellien asked our sage to preside at the annual banquet of the Bretons in Paris: the *Diner Celtique.* Renan agreed to be the permanent president of this humble festivity: a reunion of Celtic men of letters held in the purlieus of the Western Railway Station. And this accident helped to revive in his heart the love of his native place. "Quellien prolonged my life by a good ten years," cried Renan. "I felt fifty years slip from my shoulders as I refound myself in contact with my earliest memories." . . . The historian's peculiar curiosity, which was ever so responsive a fibre in him, began to vibrate in answer to this image of the Past. "I had seen the primitive world!" It was a world of immense moral solidity, but filigreed all over on the surface with poetic Pagan superstitions,—it was, we may say, a *menhir*, thick with harebells. Now the great block had fallen out of place, and the flowers with it. With every year Brittany becomes more and more a mere agglomeration of western departments—an integral part of France.

But Renan could remember the royal and Catholic Brittany of Charles the Tenth.

Renan's special gift as a historian was his art of divining the origin of things. There was something singularly primitive and archaic at the root of his supple, and apparently decadent, imagination. This vision of Celtic Brittany interested him, even as the wanderings of the Beni-Israel in Chaldea, or the small Christian communities on the shores of Nero's Asia Minor. His mother's tales,. his own first memories, put him in touch with a society, pious, primitive, simple, such as he loved to delineate. In his own childhood, he had contemplated a page of the Origins of Contemporary France. This page he wrote one day, and treated it as Taine, for all his genius, could never have done.

A meditative moralist, a student of history, Renan was no less a man of feeling. Save Rousseau or Samuel Johnson, no writer's peculiar temperament has been destined so greatly to influence modern times. He had his own magic by which he knew how to revive all thc tender, confused, rudimentary forces which blend in a heart of fifteen: love of home, unconscious love, awakening thought, the first pursuit of Truth, the first elusive escape of Faith. All these rule and inspire the *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse.*

On the threshold of old age, the philosopher turned and cast a last long lingering glance at the days of his childhood, before the Angel of Knowledge had troubled the waters of his heart. He heard the drowned church bells of the town of Ys peal again through all the waves that have gone over them—obstinate carillons, still convoking his renegade thoughts to a divine service long since silent. The priests of Tréguier rose again on his inner eye. He saw the haggard silhouette of the Bonhomme Système, and the dazed melancholy figure of the flax-crusher's daughter. He saw, in a more delicate aureole, the little girls he had played with before his first communion, and whose smile had haunted him ever since. Most men begin with the heart and end with the mind. Renan began with the mind, and never thought so much of Love as after fifty. The women and the priests, to whom he owed his breeding, had bequeathed him the sentimental turn of their imagination; and, as he grew old, this trait showed clearer—as our likeness to our forbears comes out with our grey hairs—in the oddest contrast to the sceptical attitude of his mind. As we climb down the slope of later life, the world of our fifteenth year, long since cast aside as the thing of a child, revisits us, and revives, singularly fresh and dear. And in the best-filled

life, there are hours in which we are glad to amuse ourselves again with the old vain toys which we broke a life-time ago.

Thus, nearing sixty, Renan sought to compress into an hour the aroma of all his early life; to evoke, in the twinkling of an eye, all he had once loved so much, so long ago. The *Souvenirs* are neither an autobiography nor a confession: they are, in Goethe's phrase, "Truth and Poetry" —a long conversation with remembrance, born of our instinctive pity for all that dies with us when we perish, of our instinctive wish that something, at least, of the heart of us survive. . . .

No man writing of himself was ever more natural, more simple. Renan's egotism is so devoid of display, so mere an outpouring, that it seldom irritates and never wearies. He takes us into his confidence. He sits down beside us, as it were, and beguiles us with his Past; as we show our children a picture book, to pass the time and cultivate their imagination.

The *Souvenirs* took the world by storm. They possess that lyric note of personal utterance which the public prizes in a man already famous And what shall we say of their success in Renan's old home? Disraeli's novels are not more eloquent of the "Semitic secret" than these souvenirs of the prerogative of the Celt. The writer him-

self is regarded as a mere epitome of his race. He is eloquent with the treasured silence of generations, rich with their economies of thought and imagination—but not other than they. The clear green springs; the misty skies; the moors dotted with *menhirs*, and sprinkled with the silver gleam of trembling lady birches; the Atlantic breakers rolling on the coast against the great granite promontories; the pious, stolid, fisher folk; the women of Ar-Mor, demure in their black gowns and coifs of white; the priests of Tréguier; the skyward sweep of the cathedral steeple—all these animate and inspire their faithful spokesman. These are responsible for the genius of Ernest Renan, and his glory reflects on them. . . . Such, at least, is the refrain of the *Souvenirs*.

In the middle of August 1884, Renan returned to Tréguier. He had scarcely seen the place since he left it forty years before. He had doubtless dreaded the return. But he came back as the local prophet. Despite some natural opposition on the part of the ultra-Catholics, the author of the *Souvenirs* was received so warmly that he determined to spend a part of every year in his native clime. Near Lannion, and nearer Perros Guirec, he discovered a comfortable manor-house—Rosmapamon—which his children continue

to inhabit. It is a pleasant, long, low old house, standing among woods close to the sea. Thence the name and fame of Ernest Renan spread through the country side. The peasants and fisher folk, who treated him with a rustic familiarity never repulsed, were aware of the fame of the sage of Rosmapamon, though they knew not what had earned it. The women inclined to suppose him a Saint — "C'est un bien grand Saint, Monsieur!" said one old dame, I believe, to M. Spronck. The men, seated in the tavern, swore that he was a great Republican. Quite lately there was a public fête at Tréguier to inaugurate an inscription on M. Renan's natal house, at present the property of his children. On this occasion our philosopher was greatly extolled for his Republican principles. . . . Were they so much out of count, these simple people, in their definition of the greatest Religious Critic, the truest Liberal, after all, of Modern France?

CHAPTER IV

ECCLESIASTES IN A DEMOCRACY

THE *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse* had appeared in 1883. They reflect the picturesque and emotional side of Renan—Celtic, Catholic in spite of all, and curious of the Past. Another view of his complex temperament is given in a volume which came out a few months earlier: a translation of *Ecclesiastes* with an introduction. Here we see his disenchanted self,—modern, agnostic, dilettante.

"The author of *Ecclesiastes*," says the translator, "is the author of the Book of Job grown seven centuries older. His objurgations against God, his eloquent and terrible blasphemies, have sunk into the trick of a hopeless trifling. The patriarch has suffered a change into the man of letters about town. He has no longer the strength to be angry with the Eternal: Where is the use of it?"

After a great experience of human things, Ecclesiastes has lost his faith in progress.—

The world offers a succession of phenomena which repeat themselves without essential change. What has been, will be. The wheel of things revolves, and must revolve, ever in the same circle. Our attempts at reform and progress are mere chimæras. Nothing worth knowing is knowable. Man is hopelessly limited by his faculties as by his destiny. All is vanity! The only wisdom is not to be unnecessarily miserable about that which it is certain we were never meant to alter.

Such is the melancholy philosophy of Cohelet. "No man," says Renan, "was ever less of a pedant. The clearest view of a truth never prevents him from seeing, a second later, the contrary aspect of that truth in just as sharp relief. His disenchantment does not make him in the least out of temper with the conventions of society. In him, the motives for living are all slackened and relaxed; but his lively taste for life and its pleasures remains unimpaired. He no longer seeks to explain the scheme of things, nor to invent symbols in which to incarnate a precise religion. He amuses himself rather with delightful philosophic vagaries. 'There is another evil under the sun' (he might have said) —and haply is it the greatest of them all. And this is the presumption of spirit which seeks to explain the universe in a sentence four words

long. Woe unto him who shall not contradict himself at least once a day."

The soul of Ernest Renan animates this Ecclesiastes of 1882. The portrait is a living likeness. Only, save in quite his darkest hours, Renan would scarcely have agreed that the world revolves eternally in an unalterable circle. However pessimistic, he was still a Liberal. Almost always he saw the course of the universe slowly spinning down the grooves of Time, *in a spiral*, imperceptibly advancing even when it appears to recede. If nothing be wholly good, nothing also is wholly harmful. "My philosophy," he wrote in the *Souvenirs*, "inclines me to believe that good and evil, pain and pleasure, the beautiful and the ugly, slide into one another as imperceptibly as the tints which blend on the neck of a dove." There is no Absolute—All is relative. Or if an absolute exist in the region of the infinite, we, by the constitution of our natures, are condemned to perceive only the relative. The Order of things is no Finality, "knowing what and why it worketh in a most exact order or law," but a sort of happy accident without purpose or precision. And yet—who knows? From this fortuitous combination there may proceed the Conscient Soul, whose presentiment is deep implanted in our heart. The progress of

the Universe is, perchance, the long and painful Advent of the unborn God. "Nothing proves that there exists a Soul of the Universe; nothing proves the contrary. Let us deny nothing, affirm nothing. We may hope."

In reading Mr Tollemache's "Recollections of Mark Pattison" I have been much struck by many similarities between his melancholy "Pisgah-sights" (as Browning would have said) and Ernest Renan's. Both indeed were disenchanted men, both still under the emotional sway of a creed in which their reason had ceased to acquiesce. Pattison observed that the idea of Deity has now been "defecated to a pure transparency," and Renan might have used the phrase: yet each was haunted by a more personal religious Ideal, while for ever baffled by philosophical perplexities. Only, in this baffling, Renan took, on the whole, a certain pleasure, such as robust constitutions find in walking against a wind, while Pattison's slighter nature shivered and dwindled in the blast. Both inclined to imagine a conceivable survival of the soul, contingent on its progress in this mortal sphere; and either would have defined this hoped-for after life—so dimly adumbrated, so faintly apprehended,—rather as a possible posthumous influence for good than as a renewal of our human personality; and yet,

each in softer hours, dreamed, half playfully, of his childhood's Paradise. "Shall I have my library in Heaven?" queried the scholarly Rector of Lincoln, and Renan, the dreamer, laid up stores of pleasant visions for the eternal night, as though he were half persuaded that, after death, he might still need an amusement.

An optimist at heart, Renan did not despair. "This life of four days produces some enduring fruits. . . . I can not suffer to hear our Humanity insulted—poor thing of grief, thrown like an orphan upon the earth, scarce sure of the morrow, which finds means, between the birth-throe and the death-agony, to invent art, science, virtue." Renan had, as he confessed, despite experience of the Dead Sea fruit, "a lively taste for the universe." He looked forward, though with but a moderate cheerfulness. He thought with Pattison that, when Reform has finished her perfect work, the world, destitute of originality and variety, will become a sort of universal China. He foresaw that everything tended towards Democracy, towards Socialism even, towards an Americanising of our frame of life, a prosperous vulgarity, repugnant to a man of taste. But after all, who knows? A sort of modified Chicago may be a less insupportable condition of existence than we imagine. Pattison was

too innately the Don, the College Man, to contemplate such a change without a shudder. But Renan, who was a human being and a dreamer first and a scholar afterwards—mingled some indulgence and much curiosity with his personal distaste. "Who knows, the general commonness may guarantee the happiness of the Chosen Few! American vulgarity would not have burned Giordano Bruno, nor persecuted Galileo" (Preface to *Souvenirs*).

On this subject Renan has embodied his reflections in a series of philosophical comedies, which he composed, during his autumn holidays in the Isle of Ischia in 1877 and in 1879, and which he completed later at Rosmapamon. The book appeared as a whole in 1888 under the title of *Philosophical Dramas*. Three of these tragi-comedies, *Caliban*, *The Fountain of Youth*, *The Priest of Nemi*, are priceless documents for the critic of Renan's character and opinions, which the fourth, *The Abbess of Jouarre*, on the whole a regrettable performance, obscures from the height of its bad eminence.

The dramas we have mentioned are chiefly concerned with the problems of Democracy. They show the attitude towards uncultured socialism of a Liberal Philosopher. Aristocratic by temperament and education, for no aristocracy

is so close as the sacerdotal, Renan was by principle a sort of Socialist, or at least Republican, *malgré lui*. After the Commune, through fear of the tyranny of the mob, he had warmly advocated the restoration of the monarchic principle.[1] After the stifling experience of the *Ordre Moral*, he had seen what a restoration of the Throne and Altar would really mean: the dominion of orthodoxy, that is to say, tyranny *plus* hypocrisy, the most monstrous regimen of all.

"I love Prospero (he writes in *Caliban*), but I do not love the men who would re-establish him upon the throne. Caliban, improved by power, is more to my liking. Caliban, after all, is more useful to us scholars than Prospero would be with the Jesuits for his wire-pullers. In the present circumstances, the Government of Prospero would be, not a renaissance, but a crushing-flat of all free intelligence. Let us keep Caliban!"—that is to say, Democracy. Under all his airs of ironic aristocracy, Renan kept the staunchest sense of the rights of the people. He was indeed at heart more Radical, more anti-clerical, than he cared to appear. When Jules Ferry launched his famous Article VII., almost all cultured France deplored the system of petty religious persecution which it inaugurated: clerical colleges closed, monks and

[1] *Réforme intellectuelle et morale.*

nuns expelled from their pious homes, convents inordinately taxed. "A most illiberal persecution!" assented Renan, "and, what is more . . . insufficient! I would not close a single clerical college: I would only debar the pupils of the Regular Orders from every public career." At heart, in his old age, Renan returned to the democratic point of view exhibited in his first social study, the "Future of Science." The vision is less brilliant, but it is not hopeless. Caliban (Democracy), the unformed, mindless brute, educated by his own responsibility, makes an adequate ruler after all, no worse, if not wiser, than those who went before. Prospero (the Aristocratic Principle, or, if we will, the Mind) accepts, not unwillingly, his own dethronement from practical affairs for the sake of greater liberty in the intellectual life: for Caliban proves an effective policeman, and leaves his superiors the freest of hands in the laboratory. Ariel (the Religious Principle[1]) learns at last not to give up the ghost at the faintest hint of change. Robuster, if less ethereal, he, too, flourishes in the service of Prospero under the external government of the many-headed Brute. The future of Ariel is in fact secured by the unconscious co-operation of Prospero and Caliban. Every great religion is

[1] Compare with *The Tempest* Isaiah xxix., where Jerusalem is figured under the symbolic name of Ariel.

the result of some such fecund misunderstanding. Nor is the future of Science less secure. "In the Ledger of Knowledge every truth is added up, every error omitted. Error is sterile, essentially perishable."[1] Truth alone knows how to capitalise her vast, her continually multiplying resources, which, as it were at compound interest, increase from year to year. In spite of all, the only needful things are *not* destined to succumb: Religion and Knowledge are as imperishable as the world which they dignify.

Thus, out of the depths, rises unvanquished the essential idealism of Ernest Renan.

Faith and Science had ever occupied his mind. On the threshold of old age, his philosophy became aware of another great entity, of Love, which, up to the age of five-and-fifty or thereabouts, had appeared to him a personal accident, of keen interest doubtless to the individuals it concerned, but scarcely a problem, hardly an immense universal force such as Beauty, Virtue, Truth, or Faith. When we are old, we secretly prize that which we disregarded most in its due season. Love and the charm of woman took a great importance in the eyes of our philosopher, grown prematurely aged, the unwieldiest of mortals, the wittier Dr Johnson of Parisian society. There

[1] Preface to *Feuilles Détachées*.

is something, we must own, a little grotesque in this tardy Cupid perched on the rim of Socrates' basket. Love as the interplanetary essence, the running music of the spheres binding all existence in one harmony, Love the μεθόριον πνεῦμα may occupy the sage at any decade. And we are moved and pleased by the ageing scholar's recollection of the girlish faces which had brightened existence for him some forty years ago. But that were enough; we did not desire the *Abbesse de Jouarre*!

"At Christmas we no more desire a rose"—

And the rose, of an odd blue unhealthy-looking sort, takes to blooming in Renan's frostiest season.

His life, as all who knew him can aver, was ever the life of a saint, and would appear of the purest, judged by the canons of any doctrine. Quaintly enough, he considered that this white apex of his gave him a singularly favourable point of view for scrutinising the nice enigmas of the heart. In the *Abbesse of Jouarre* he writes the apology of instinct. Chastity, says he, is often only another name for the merest social prudence: were the world to end to-morrow we should all abandon ourselves without remorse to our most passionate desires. His excuse must be that, in his peculiar mind, the most frivolous

fantasies slide into philosophic symbols. . . . In the course of the universe Renan descried two impelling forces — the gradual process which develops, and the rare divine capricious impulse of spontaneity, which, as with a leap and a bound, hurries on the slow progress of cosmic elaboration; steps in, at difficult moments, like a god out of a machine; suggests Speech to the bleating and calling Bushmen; makes the perplexed savage, as he notches his tally, dream of writing and arithmetic; which, in fact, is continually intervening with the happiest effect, in the interminable evolution of the god from the sea-anemone. Love, in the eyes of Renan, was the constant manifestation of this force of spontaneity without which no great thing had fully achieved its being. Woman is the pure depositary of instinct; and, as such, she is precious above all things in the eyes of the philosopher.

"The more man develops his brain, the more he dreams of the opposite pole, of the Irrational, of a repose in complete ignorance—of the woman who is only a woman, of the instinctive being whose acts are guided by the impulse of an obscurer consciousness. . . . When our meditations have led us to the last term of doubt—then the spontaneous affirmation of the Good and the Beautiful in a woman's soul enchants us, and

may yet give the casting vote. . . . Through her we are still in union with that eternal source of things, wherein God is reflected."[1]

It was this difference in woman which attracted Renan. Here was something at his hand whose movements he could not predicate, whose organs and whose instincts obeyed apparently different laws from those which regulated his own being. The curiosity of the philosopher was invincibly attracted. We all know how, in the Indian drama, the men speak in Sanscrit, the heroines in Pracrit. Renan knew his Sanscrit grammar by heart; it was stale to him. In his old age he longed to learn this Pracrit poetry of woman. "If born again," he said in one of his last prefaces, "I would be born a woman."

Woman, exalted in Renan's later philosophy, repaid a hundredfold the adulation of the sage. Uncouth in frame and gait, as some gnome-like Breton saint, unworldly as the village *curé* he always looked like, Renan became the arbiter of the more intellectual elegancies of Paris. Fair ladies slept happy when they had exhibited him in their salons; bonnets from Virot drooped a trifle disconcerted at the uncompromising scholarship of his lectures at the College of France; latter-day Magdalenes consulted him as to the

[1] *Préface au Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse.*

state of their conscience, and music-hall singers asked his opinion on their songs. We have spoken of Samuel Johnson. The great Doctor himself did not wield a more undisputed or a less-to-be-expected social sway over last-century London than Ernest Renan over the Paris of the Eighties. Victor Hugo, perhaps, was more of a popular enthusiasm, but Renan was both Society's and Caliban's special prophet. Perhaps the good opinion they entertained of him may have influenced our philosopher's estimate of Society, and of Caliban. For to both of these, in his latter days, he became extraordinarily indulgent.

In 1879 Renan had been elected to the French Academy. The Academy accepted him with reluctance; but we may say that he reigned there, even as he reigned—a placid, benevolent, ambiguous divinity—over most of the learned societies of Paris. President of the Asiatic Society in 1882, he was, in the summer of 1884, appointed Administrator of the College of France—Principal, or Rector, as we should say at Oxford. He came into residence on his return from Rosmapamon. The local divinity was poorly housed in the old building of the Rue des Ecoles; a meagre study looking north did not spare his rheumatism; the narrow bedrooms were

worthy of a convent, but there was a fair-sized salon to frame Scheffer's pictures, and endless garrets for the innumerable books. It is doubtful if Renan was ever happier than in this inconvenient apartment. After his death his devoted wife, in setting his papers in order, found in a drawer a collection of old half-sheets, backs of envelopes, and such like, on which, from time to time, her husband had scrawled his reflections. On one of these she read: "I have known the grip of poverty, but never have I been so badly housed as at the College of France." Since then the residence has been twice enlarged to suit two successive Administrators, and at present it is all that health and commodity require. As much, and more, would have been done for Renan had it occurred to him to ask for repairs. But it is charmingly characteristic of the man that he never thought of it. In some moment of irritation he confided to a private *Bocca di Leone*, and perhaps to the ear of the Eternal, his just dissatisfaction . . . and then forgot it. I doubt if he would have suffered an improvement. It is certain that he would not have exchanged his beloved college for the palace of the Elysée.

The least practical of men, Renan proved an admirable Administrator. Whatever he set his hand to do, he did it with all his might. One

of his colleagues has set on record the unsuspected firmness that underlay his charming genius :—

"Very indulgent to others, and convinced that few of the things for which men torment themselves are really worth the trouble, there was *one* thing as to which he was ever inflexible; for if we seek the continual motive of his life, in the sphere of action, we shall find it to have been the most abstract sense of duty. This man, who seemed to prize especially the grace of courtesy, among all the virtues of St Sulpice, who always seemed to seek for the phrase most pleasant to the ear of his interlocutor, be he whom he might, and who often carried the caress of his amiability to the verge of an apparent irony—this man, so indifferent and so pliant in appearance, became a bar of iron so soon as one sought to wrest from him an act or a word contrary to the intimate sense of his conscience." [1]

No man had a stronger sense of a professional engagement. Tortured with rheumatism, faint with the oppressed action of his heart, he never let his ill-health interfere with his lectures. I have seen him carried down the steep staircase of the College by hired porters—his bulk made it no easy thing to do—in order to attend an

[1] James Darmesteter, *Ernest Renan*. *See Critique et Politique*, p. 64.

election of the Academy. The least personal, the least glorious of his labours occupied him most. The last months of his life were given to the volume on the Rabbis of France in the fourteenth century, which he was compiling from the notes of Dr Neubauer, and which, I suppose, scarce one of my readers will have read, or even heard of. The most arid, the most ungrateful of tasks, Renan was delighted to subject himself to this labour, which he deemed useful, and which no one certainly would undertake if he left it undone. At the same moment all Paris, nay, all the *élite* of Europe, was smiling over the exquisite *Feuilles Détachées.* I have little doubt that in his heart of hearts, Renan preferred the Rabbis.

Traversed by ill-health, disciplined by hard work, these years of apotheosis, these years of the eighties, were very happy years, full of family love, full of a just fame, to which Renan was never indifferent; full of the flattery of popular applause. Surrounded by those he loved—his delightful wife ("She must have been specially made for me," he used to say); his gifted, sensitive son; his exquisite daughter, in whom his dreams of Celtic grace had come to a perfect flower; with his grandchildren about his knees, Paris at his feet, Renan spent happy winters in

his high-perched study of the College, and happy summers in his Breton manor. With Ecclesiastes, he exclaimed, more than once, that this, at least, is not vanity: to grow old with the wife of our youth, and to enjoy the modest fortune amassed by one's honest labours. That fortune was very modest, it is true; but no shadow of money cares, no thought for the morrow, ever touched the serene self-detachment of this inveterate disciple of Mary. His children still smile when they recall how, one afternoon, in their private, domestic Commission of the Budget, Madame Renan exposed the narrow extent of the family resources. "'Tis true, 'tis true," said Renan, with sagacious impersonal calm, as he swayed himself from side to side. "Money shows no signs of rolling our way!" But the fact appeared less important to him, it was evident, than the date of the last discovered Himyarite inscription. Care and trouble came not nigh him.

It was at this moment that I made the acquaintance of M. and Madame Renan and their children. Well do I remember the day, the year, the season! It was in September 1880. I was travelling in Italy with my parents. At Venice we fell in with a friend of my father's—Signor Castellani, the archæologist. He invited us to spend a day at Torcello with the Renans, Sir

Henry Layard, and his wife. I was a young girl then, more familiar with the Nineveh Courts of the British Museum (for which I worshipped Sir Henry Layard) and with Signor Castellani's exquisite Bronze Mask in the same collection, than with any writing of M. Renan's. In fact, save for a lecture on Marcus Aurelius, which I had heard him deliver a few months before, I knew him only by repute, as a heretic (that was attractive), and a philologist (which seemed less interesting). But after the first half-hour in his company I saw that here, here was the Man of Genius! I thought him like the enchanter Merlin—not Burne-Jones' graceful wizard, but some rough-hewn, gnome-like, Saint-Magician of Armor. What a leonine head, with its silvery mane of soft, grey hair, surmounted that massive girth! What an elfin, delicate light shone in the clear eyes, and lurked in the sinuous lines of the smile! How lucid, how natural, how benign the intelligence which mildly radiated from him! M. Renan was at his best on that occasion. We all felt ourselves in the glad society of an Immortal. . . . I still see the little Italian gunboat cutting through the bright lagoon towards the desolate shores of Torcello, fringed with scarlet-dotted pomegranate hedges and wastes of lilac-tipped sea-lavender! How bril-

liant the mother-island looked in her abandonment. The brown old church inspired M. Renan. At that moment, with a heart divided between the glory of Hellas and the spiritual grace of Christianity, few things, indeed, could have touched him nearer than that ancient Mosaic, where the Apocalyptic Angels pour the Wrath of God from vials shaped like the purest classic cornucopiæ. He stood long in front of it. He discoursed to the eminent archæologists who accompanied him ; we all listened, we girls no less earnestly than they, if with less understanding. At first I had thought him ugly, I confess. But, as he spoke, he grew almost handsome. The great head, held on one side, half in criticism, half in propitiation, was so puissant in its mass ; the blue eyes beamed with wit and playful kindness. How he savoured, and made us savour, that image of the anger of the Eternal elegantly treasured in the horns of plenty. How he revived for us the soul of the mother-church of Venice—the handful of poor refugees: primitive people, shipwrecked, as it were, upon that lonely island ; yet, in their way, refined thinkers, with a command of art and image, as became the heirs of more than one immeasurable ideal.

Seven years later I went to see the Renans at the College of France, and thenceforward they

both are blended with the happy memories of my married life. Madame Renan bestowed her kind protecting friendship on the foreign bride. Her husband, as Head of the College, as President of the Asiatic Society where M. Darmesteter was Secretary, was my husband's "chief"—and in more ways than these, for was he not first among the students of old faiths, and the leader of Oriental philologists in France? Though much firmness and an unalterable decision were masked by that benignant affability of his, he was the most genial of chiefs. I remember one afternoon, when we were in mourning and my husband ill, how he walked quickly into our little salon, embraced James on either cheek, tapped him on the shoulder, and pinned the Cross of the Legion of Honour in his coat.

If we went to see him in his study at the College, how wise were his counsels, never volunteered! No man made less of a fetish of his work. Those golden phrases of his were often interrupted, for his time was at the disposal of those who needed it. When a visitor arrived, he would lay down his pen, give his mind to his guest until the door shut upon him, and then he would resume, without a pause, the unfinished sentence. So he threw off the first jet, generally copied by Madame Renan, recorrected, set up by

the printer, and polished slowly and lovingly on proof after proof of his interminable revise.

He was somewhat disquieted by the drones and butterflies drawn to the College by the honey of his hive. One cannot imagine his serenity ruffled. But a summer lightning of irony would play in his eyes when too many tall English tourists, too many marvellous Parisian toilettes, occupied the narrow benches of the little "Salle des Langues." I am told that on one such occasion, seeing his own students ousted, he bowed to the motley company as amiably as ever—"I am enchanted," he began, "to observe the vogue for abstruse Hebrew studies which obtains to-day. In the presence of so choice an audience (another bow) there can be no need of an introduction to our subject. We will therefore read our text, phrase after phrase, in turn—in the original Hebrew"—a quick dispersion left the scholars to their book.

M. Renan talked marvellously well, and he loved talking. He had little of the ready give-and-take which is the most usual form of wit, yet he had a colloquial magic of his own. His conversation was an attentive silence, interrupted by long pauses of solitary meditation, and by outbursts of radiant monologue. He liked dining out. Some of my most agreeable recollections

are of the subtle and singular reflections with which, as with the wave of a fairy wand, our enchanter would turn a Paris dinner-party into an elect symposium. He could be grave—he could be gay. That night, for instance, when he told us—with what charm! with what elegant lightness!—the story of the Babylonian Tobias. Rash and young, this Chaldæan brother of our Tobit, discouraged by the difficult approaches of prosperity, had entered into partnership with a demi-god or Demon, who made all his schemes succeed and pocketed fifty per cent. upon the profits. The remaining fifty sufficed to make Tobias as rich as Oriental fancy can imagine. The young man fell in love, married his bride and brought her home. . . . On the threshold stood the Demon: "How about my fifty per cent.?" The Vénus d'Ille, you see, was not born yesterday. From the dimmest dawn of time, sages have taught us not to trust the gods too far!

Μυριάνους ἀνήρ—M. Renan had far other moods. I remember a more serious banquet. It was at the house of the dear philosopher of the Rue Cassette. The Renans were there, some others, the Lyttons, I believe, and ourselves. That morning M. Taine had received a bundle of the papers of the Psychical Research Society. The psychologist—much interested at that time in

the problems of dual personality and so forth—let the conversation wander into the dubious sphere of the phantoms of the living. M. Renan appeared sunk in a dream of his own. From time to time he shook his mane, like a slumbering lion. Suddenly he looked up and spoke, with a flash in his blue eyes—*θεὸς ὤν τις ἐλεγκτικός*. Briefly indeed, and with a rare scorn in his irony, did the cross-examining God dispose of those vague approximations, those imprecise reminiscences of another's experience, which suffice to found a fact in the annals of unscientific observers. Truth, Science, were eloquently bid to the rescue, enjoined to engulph and swallow up the miracle-mongery, the wonder-worship, still so dear to the fashionable uneducated. And suddenly the prophet relented, cast up his hands in kindly deprecation—"O les gens du monde! la science des gens du monde!" In spite of all, he knew he had a weakness for these well-bred culprits.

Such outbursts were rare. The affable Archangel concealed them, as it were, under a cassock of non-committal ecclesiastical courtesy. He generally acquiesced. I used to wonder what assertion would be too wild to provoke his amiable "Mais certainement, Madame!" He would let any young lady explain to him the

nicest points in Semitic archæology without a protest. Sometimes I tried, I admit, how far one could go. Perhaps there was a twinkle in the kindly indifferent eye. Never anything so pedantic as a contradiction.

M. Renan and I were born on the same day — at an interval of some five-and-thirty years—or rather we thought we were so born. For it is characteristic of the idealist that all his life he thought himself a day older than he was. On the 27th of February, notes and flowers went gaily between us. For M. Renan was gay: M. Lemaître has reproached him with the fact, and it is true. Despite old age, and constant pain, lack of breath, and sometimes lack of means—despite the prospect of the end at hand, M. Renan was gay, unfailingly patient, cheerful, and serene. One 27th of February there were no more good wishes, and yet, as we talked with Madame Renan, the kind sage seemed almost one among us. "A widow," said Michelet, "should be her husband's soul delayed among us." Such was she. The thoughts, the wishes, the counsels, the memories of M. Renan lingered with us eighteen months after we had bidden him farewell. The past abided with her. She would spend hours contentedly reviving the episodes of their journey in Asia Minor, living over again

the first years of her marriage. Happy years full of youth and love and poverty, when, at the end of his long day's work, she used to carry off her young husband on some inexpensive adventure. "We used to call on the cats of the Quarter! M. Renan had names for them all. You may put that in your book!" she would say with a smile. This book was a favourite project of her's. We made plans for writing it together; and, indeed, I could never have written it without her. But she missed too sorely, she mourned too faithfully, the hero of our biography, and, before a line of it was set down, I learned one day, at her door, that she would never read it.

But remembrance carries me too fast. Those days have not yet dawned. A brief spell of life and noble labour remains to Ernest Renan.

CHAPTER V

THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

IN that writing-table drawer to which our philosopher confided so many private ejaculations, Madame Renan found a slip of paper on which was written: "Of all that I have done, I prefer the *Corpus*." Of average, well-read persons, taking an interest in European literature, I suppose some fifty per cent. may have read the *Souvenirs* of Ernest Renan, and perhaps twenty per cent. the *Life of Jesus*, and ten, at most, let us say, some other work of the master's — usually the *Feuilles Détachées*, or the recently published *Letters*, but occasionally *St Paul*, or the *Apostles*, or perhaps one of the two lovely volumes of *Religious Studies*, or the *Essays on Moral Science and Criticism*. But for every hundred cultured readers, scarce the fraction of a unit can be placed to the account of the *Corpus*. The *Corpus Semiticarum Inscriptionum* is not in any sense a book. It is a tool for scholars. It is a collection of all

the Semitic inscriptions as yet discovered on Jewish, Aramean, Phœnician, Himyarite, Carthaginian, Cypriote, Greek, Egyptian, Sicilian, Maltese, Sardinian, Arabian, Assyrian, and Chaldæan monuments. The comparison of these inscriptions — the unsuspected details, the singular *rapprochements*, which result from such a comparison—is, perhaps, the most important factor in the exegesis and the historical discoveries of the future. In the study of the Past no detail is insignificant; the most patient analysis of the greatest possible quantity of authentic material is the first condition of historic insight. A poet, a prophet may touch the dry bones and make them live. But without these dry bones, apparently so mouldered and remote, even an Ezekiel were of no avail. Renan never forgot this essential truth. His soaring genius was constantly refreshed from the humble springs of fact and certainty.

It was in 1867 that M. Renan proposed to the Academy of Science and Belle Lettres the formation of a *Corpus* for Semitic inscriptions on the model of Bœkh's Greek Corpus; but it was only in 1881 that the first number was given to the world. Semitic epigraphy is a recent science, and every year adds to its scanty store, and patiently reanimates the past of Israel, and of the

neighbours of Israel, too long transfigured by an exclusively sacred tradition into something out of the likeness of human days and works. The materials are slowly accumulating for a definite history of the Semitic kingdoms. M. Renan, nourished on the Bible, familiar with the sites and races of the Holy Land, was almost the first to perceive the extent of the fresh resources offered by recent epigraphy.

Renan commenced his "History of the People of Israel" at sixty years of age—the first volume appeared in 1887—having spent his whole life in studying the materials which critics, scholars, archæologists, and explorers have gathered concerning the Semitic peoples. Forty years before he had planned his great work on the "Origins of Christianity." "I ought to have begun with the Prophets," he said later; but the figure of Jesus attracted him with an incessant magnetism, and besides, a delicate lad of twenty, he had not dared to count upon so long a future. Now he determined to fill up the weak places in his foundations, and to found Christianity, as in truth it is founded, on the teachings of Amos, of Isaiah, of Ezekiel, and especially of the great nameless prophet, who wrote the latter chapters of the book we call Isaiah's.

Following in the wake of Wellhausen and

Kuenen, M. Renan places the Prophets at the very core and centre of Jewish thought—the Prophets, not Moses or Elias. The first volume of his history is perhaps disappointing; it is less a history than a vague poetic rhapsody—such as we expect from a Michelet rather than a Renan—a piece of cosmic folk-lore, too merely grandiose and picturesque. Yet it contains a page on the civilisation of Babylonia which no reader can forget; and the idyll of Father Orcham, the ideal king of the Chaldæan golden age, whom the pastors of Israel adopted for their ancestor, has the true ring of a primitive fable. But surely M. Renan exaggerates the monotheism of these tribal wanderers? He is never so happy as when divining in its ultimate recesses, calling up from its deepest hiding-places, the different forms of religious feeling. And yet we think he antedates the religious tendency of these primitive tribesmen. Surely in their attitude towards the Unknown there was little but dread and mere propitiation.

Something of the same fatigue, the same inadequacy, is shown in the history of David and Solomon, however picturesque, however full of recondite and charming detail. Yet David, the brigand chief, ruling Israel by means of his Cretan mercenaries; Solomon, the intelligent, unpreju-

diced, wise man of the East, much like many a Jew of our days—shrewd, epicurean, materialist, blind to the true vocation of his race: these are figures which impress us by their reality despite the defects of the volume which contains them. Of these defects the greatest is an excessive use of Renan's peculiar irony. The immensity of his mental horizon is such as to include, and as it were to associate, objects which appear to belong to different spheres of thought. What can be more disconcerting than his serene and candid fashion of assuring us how much the Book of Jonah resembles *La Belle Hélène?*—that Jeremiah was a journalist of the type of Félix Pyat, and Ezekiel a sort of Victor Hugo at Hauteville House, unless, indeed, we consider him more like Fourier? These unexpected comparisons startle and shock the attention of readers less familiar with the antipodes of history; and, while acquitting our placid sage of any childish desire to merely dazzle or astonish. I own that I consider these "actualities" misplaced. They may occasionally illuminate, as by a searchlight, some obscure and dusty purlieu of the Past. But more often they merely serve to irritate the student; and, after a short lapse of years, they will seem even more incomprehensible: two Pasts, neither familiar, will then confuse each other. This con-

tinual blemish mars the third volume of the *History of Israel* no less, and perhaps even more, than the two earlier ones. But, at this point, it is caught up and, as it were, whirled out of sight in the noble and living current of the work. For M. Renan touches his true subject at last in dealing with the Prophets of Israel. The notion of justice, of righteousness unto God and Man, the divine necessity of self-amelioration, was born into the world with Amos and Hosea, and their religion is big with our future.

Renan's *History of Israel* is, in fact, a history of the religious Idea; a chronicle of the divine thirst after justice done, not to ourselves, but to all men, for the greater glory of God. The prehistoric cosmogony of Israel is, in this sense, not religious at all: neither the Elohim, the multiple sprites of the air, nor Yahveh, the storm-god of Sinai, have any clear idea of right and wrong. They have not plucked as yet the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Their will is capricious, inexplicable, absurd; the Elohim wrestle all night with the sons of earth, and are wounded by a man at cock-crow; they enter into a chief's garden, and sit at meat with him. Yahveh is of a revolting partiality; he protects his favourites, he takes care of his own, however little exemplary their conduct, so that it is wise indeed to be the servant

of Yahveh. The world which these deities govern is quite small; a ladder connects it with the heaven which they inhabit. One may say that up to the death of Solomon true religion was unknown. The deity was still the tribal god: his prophet was still a sorcerer, a medicine-man, a sort of mythic wonder-worker. But let us not despair of that divine instinct in humanity which knows how to turn dross into gold, how to evolve, from the primitive terror of soothsay, the idea of justice, the search for truth, the thirst after righteousness. "Behold the days come (saith the Lord) that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread nor a thirst after water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos, viii. 11). And behold, the Word of the Lord has grown in its significance. Yahveh no longer says "worship me and prosper"; he says "eschew evil and do good." He commands no more "take thy brother's birthright," but "love thy neighbour as thyself."

It is this moral evolution which is the secret of the undying importance of the *History of Israel.* Full of ruse and guile, destitute of the sense of Beauty which ennobled Greece, or of the political and military grandeur which made the force of Rome, this small Syrian tribe is no less immortal than Greece or Rome, for it first interpreted the

secret oracle within the heart of humanity. All the great fibres of spiritual being vibrate in the soul of Israel. Wonder of wonders, the instinct of religion reveals to the prophet even how the day shall dawn when religion shall be other than he may conceive it—freer, ampler, tied to no ritual, bound upon the horns of no altar.

"And it shall come to pass (saith the Lord) that ye shall say no more: 'The Ark of the Covenant of the Lord': neither shall it come to mind: neither shall ye remember it; neither shall ye visit it; neither shall these things be done any more—neither shall ye walk any more after the imagination of an evil heart" (Jeremiah iii. 16).

Every great gift is developed and nourished at the expense of the exhausted organism which produces it. The soul, that perfect flower of Israel, ruined the material prosperity of Israel. The doctrines of the Prophets are not compatible with any strong military or civic organisation. Preoccupied with individual justice,—individual well-doing and well-being—Amos and Jeremiah conceived as iniquity the nation which deliberately devotes thousands of its offspring to the brutal and stupid life of tent and camp. The Assyrian hoplite appeared to them even lower

in the scale than the captive of the Assyrians —for him, at least, there should be no return from exile, no promised restoration. And in a primitive civilisation, the country which means to conquer, which means to dominate, can only do so at the cost of the enforced service of the mass: a colossal unconsented slavery in the interests of a fatherland which absorbs and does not reward the factors of its grandeur. There is its fine side, too, in the military glory of an Assyria or an Egypt. But Israel only sees the innocent blood, the endless tears of the just man offended, with which the stones of their pyramids are welded together. And she will none of the magnificence of Assur.

More than once, in writing the *History of Israel*, Renan's thoughts reverted to his own times. In Amos and Hosea, in Jeremiah and Isaiah, he saw the forerunners of the socialists of our age. In Nineveh and Babylon he saw the ancestors of feudal Germany. Which is the wiser? Almost invariably, the nation which labours for Humanity and the Future works its own destruction in the process. The Kingdom of God is not of this world. In the administration of a great power, in the maintenance of a national army, there are abuses which are almost necessary. A society which is always just is disarmed

before the strength of the unscrupulous. A people whose teachers are concerned only with the eternal verities will be far behind Babylon, not simply in practical affairs, but also in natural science. It was Babylon, after all, which first attempted to explain the Universe; Israel borrowed the ten opening chapters of Genesis from the *savants* of Chaldæa. An exclusive preoccupation with piety and morals is apt to produce a very mediocre standard of culture. The ideal of Israel is the ideal of a saint, a prophet, a monk, a Savonarola. But which did the most for Florence, Savonarola or the Medici?

The happiness and the sanctity of the individual, or the splendour and force of the organism of which he is an atom: whether of these is desirable? More than once Renan has asked himself the question, to which there are only too many answers. Whichever response we accept may be an error, for, when all is said, which of us can be sure of what is in fact the real object of Humanity?

"He, at least, is not wholly mistaken who fears lest he be in the wrong and treats no one as blind; who, ignoring the goal of Man, loves him as he strives, he and his work; who seeks the Truth in doubting of heart, and who says to his opponent: 'Perchance seest thou clearer than I.'

He, in fine, who accords his fellows the wide liberty he takes for himself;—he surely may sleep in peace and await the judgment of all things, if such a judgment there shall be."[1]

[1] *Hist. du peuple d'Israel*, III., p. 279.

CHAPTER VI

LAST DAYS

"IN the Name of Life, the vast, the mysterious, the excellent!" So begins the Bible of the Mendaïtes, and under this invocation would I place the last philosophy of Ernest Renan. The final reaction of his mind was, after all, optimistic. Man is full of errors, but error is essentially transitory, and the eternal result of his passage through the universe is Truth. God is absent from the scheme of things in the sense of Action; in all the ages of human history no trustworthy evidence attests a divine intervention to protect the innocent or to relieve the sufferer. But the law and condition of so much of the Universe as we may understand is ever a perpetual *Fieri*, a divine Becoming, an eternal development towards an unknown end, which may become at last a manifestation of the Hidden Divinity. Nor, because His ways are not as our ways, His thoughts as our thoughts, let us too hastily conclude the eternal absence of that Heavenly Father which the heart of man claims, and to which he calls

incessantly without response. Out of our tears and our prayers He may yet be born. Moreover, rightly considered, is not that call of ours its own answer? Disinterested prayer is not a petition but an act of praise, an act of Hope, an inner communing with the principle of things, an affirmation of the spiritual Reality which governs appearances. "And our day-dreams themselves are another fashion of adoring—a poor inferior prayer, full of long remainders of the ardour of our youth, warm as covered embers are, instinct with the secret assurance that the Absolute Night itself is, perchance, not devoid of this same lingering warmth and life!"[1] The unselfish man—the only one who counts—prays in secret a hundred times a day. For an acquiescence in the laws of that Universe, in which alone we may see God,—"as in a glass, darkly,"—is not this also Prayer and an act of Faith?

We must fain believe in Something independent of the Finite and the Knowable, when in our own hearts, in our own lives, in the lives of all around us we observe the persistence and the universality of certain great guiding principles which are folly, according to the wisdom of this world: self-sacrifice, love, disin-

[1] Preface to the *Nouvelles Etudes Religieuses*.

terestedness, the instinct of Duty. These are the voice of the Universe, "a language which hails from the Infinite, perfectly clear in its commands, obscure in its promises"[1]—a language, which in some fashion and degree, we all obey. No man is absolutely and consistently a monster; in every life there is *some* effort towards Love, Truth, or Beauty; the worst man drops one of these priceless gold coins into the world's coffer against the millions of mere brass counters which he squanders out of window. And in the scheme of things, Good is a coin of great price, Evil is poor trash of no value. Thus there is scarce any existence which, rightly summed up, does not show an imperceptible balance to the good.

Like Francis of Assisi, whom he understood so well ("St Francis will save him!" once cried a Capuchin friar), Renan had arrived at the supreme indulgence—he no longer believed in the existence of sin. Evil appeared to him a void, a vacuum, a gap to be filled up in the gradual process of Creation; but not a substance to be vanquished and destroyed. Of him also might it be said: "He would not admit the reality of evil. It is not that he was indifferent, but, in probing the heart of man, he found no irre-

[1] *Feuilles Détachées*: Examen de Conscience Philosophique.

missible guilt in it: the one sin is baseness; weakness, error, seemed to him scarcely sin."[1] He would have said with Plato, that when the Soul is alienate from Truth, it is always momentarily so constrained against its will: the natural growth of our spirits being towards the light. An involuntary opinion can not be a crime. Let us believe that the sin of our neighbour is no affair of ours, and probably infinitely less important than we deem it. In time, the Truth will certainly prevail, and convince even them that sit in outer darkness.

The two fundamental doctrines of religion remain undemonstrable: no man can prove the existence of a personal God, nor the immortality of the Soul. The task of the modern thinker is the task of Kant—the task of the Prophets of Israel. *They* justified the ways of God to man with little more than the minimum of faith; from the rebellious stuff of humanity they extracted righteousness and resignation, and patient depths of long self-sacrifice, with no sure promise of a future life. They loved God for God, and the right for the sake of righteousness. Happy those who can so inspire their fellows without alleging anything unproven, anything with which their conscience may reproach them

[1] *Nouvelles Études Religieuses:* St François d'Assise, p. 333.

as a lure. Piety may exist independent of all dogma, and may prove the inner strength and consolation of the Soul. We may still "seek God," like the wise men of Israel, and find much sweetness in that seeking. We may weep to Him alone in our trouble, nor our tears be shed in vain. For in the end, in the infinite end of ages, Humanity creates the thing which it desires. And at last, at last, all the dreams of Man come true.

Thus "the most logical attitude of the thinker towards Religion is: to behave as though Religion were true. We must act as though God and the Soul were proven. Religion is one of the numerous hypotheses, such as the waves of ether, or the electric, luminous, caloric and nervous fluids, nay, the atom itself, which we know to be mere symbols and manners of speech, convenient for the explaining of certain phenomena, but which, none the less, we maintain."[1] The more we reflect, the more we see the impossibility of proving, but also the *moral necessity* of believing in, these great premisses: God and the Soul. Let us keep the category of the Unknowable! Parallels meet at the Infinite: Science and Religion doubtless meet there. And

[1] Examen de Conscience.—*Feuilles Détachées*, p. 432.

if not?—Why, then, Renan would have said with Goethe:

"Wen Gott betrügt ist wohl betrogen."

The most intelligent course of Man, as well as the most virtuous, is to act in the general sense of Universal Law. *Domine, si error est, a te decepti sunt!*

In philosophy the consolatory hypothesis is, after all, as good an hypothesis as any other. It is the only one which could abidingly content a man like Renan, who,—dilettante and scholar as he remained, no doubt,—was none the less, by the inner constitution of his being, a profoundly religious man. The needs of his nature were triple: his heart desired Beauty and his mind Truth; but the earnest problem of Man's virtue in Nature's ruthlessness was the fundamental preoccupation of his soul.

"I often reproach myself (he said, in almost the last pages that fell from his hand) because at my age, I am sometimes occupied with other things than these Eternal Verities. My excuse is that my chief duty here below is accomplished. . . . That last arch of the bridge which I had still to throw between Christianity and Judaism, is now established. . . . I have still much to do in the way of proof-correcting; but, if I died

to-morrow, with the aid of a good corrector, my *History of Israel* could appear in its completeness."[1]

The third and finest volume of this last and great work appeared in 1891. Renan did not live to see the publication of the two concluding tomes, which he left almost finished, lacking, indeed, those fine last touches, those delicate elaborations and reservations, which he was wont to add—patiently, interminably—on page after page of his proofs. The pearl has less gloss, and a dimmer orient, it may be; but its orb is perfect, and its structure sound. The chapters on Philo and the Essenians, which adorn the fifth volume, are among the most vivid and the purest which we owe to Renan's singular genius. Age could not stale nor custom wither that infinite variety. The extraordinary freshness, the divine youth of his spirit remained almost unimpaired by suffering, to his last hour. It is a freshness as of thyme and dew on a spring morning; something natural, and sweet, and pure; and it was never more conspicuous, as mere style, than in those *Feuilles Détachées*, which he collected and published in the very year of his death.

For long enough his health had been failing. He took all the little miseries of age and a broken

[1] Preface to *Feuilles Détachées*.

constitution in that spirit of mingled irony and sweetness which never left him. Before mere physical suffering, he was ever serene as an image of Buddha. Enforced idleness was a sorer burden, and sometimes he would half complain that in his childhood he had never learned to play. His little grandchildren began his instruction in that wise art. But the sage was too tired to prove an apt pupil. He liked best to look on and listen, thinking of many things, and enjoying that last pleasure of watching life's morning windows brighten when the sun forsakes us in the west.

Few people suffer more than he in his last illness. Protracted neuralgia tortured him month by month. He admitted the fact, but never murmured, and would certainly not have owned himself unhappy. For he loved Life, and saw that it was good. Self-pity was a weakness which he knew not. Nor did his own pain ever blind him to the immense sum of virtue, love, beauty, knowledge, and innocent happiness, which, all round him, at that instant, the universe was yielding undiminished. That tiny but eternal residue of good, that drop of immortal aroma, which the scheme of things secretes from day to day, appeared to impregnate every moment of his life, and to embalm even the pangs of his

agony. I think there was no day, even of that cruel last year, from which he would not have offered from a sincere heart, his *Te Deum Laudamus.* If there were hours in it racked with intercostal neuralgia, stupefied with oppressive weakness, there were also moments — divine moments whose superior value outweighed those hours—in which he was able to complete the great task of his life; or which he gave to the management of that beloved College whose good genius he was; or he spent them in discussing with a few chosen spirits—M. Berthelot, M. Taine, M. Gaston Paris, and some others ever welcome—the questions which occupied his unfailing mind in sickness as in health; or, simply, he let himself rest in the tender love of his dear wife and children.

He knew that he was dying. The physicians continued to speak of gout, of rheumatism, of neuralgia—but it is, I think, impossible to have a mortal disease and not to know it: for years he had told his wife that his heart was affected. But he was dying at the end of his chosen task, having completed the immense circle which he had dared to trace. He had married his daughter, and had embraced her children. The sensitive artistic spirit of his son, the painter, showed itself calmed and fortified by the first draught of success,

His wife, the trusted confidante and secretary of more than thirty years, would execute his last wishes, and would see his History through the press. One of his favourite pupils would succeed him in his chair at the College of France, and in the direction of the Corpus. He could repeat with the ancient Simeon: *Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum, in pace. . . .*

The future, in fine, was a spectacle which he could regard with a great satisfaction. He had given his life to Truth, and he had certainly furthered her progress. He had chosen the better part, and it had not been taken away from him. The things in which he had put the truest part of his life would survive him, and would be fruitful in his absence. Untimely death may be terrible, for it may mean a waste of immense possibilities. But death when our task is achieved? Why rebel against the law of nature? Did we ever believe ourselves exempt from mortality?

At the New Year of 1892 the Renans went to Cap Martin for a few weeks of sun and sea. The blue Mediterranean shore enveloped the dying sage with its enchantment. He felt better, well, saw the future brighten and lengthen before him. But the south in winter is a cup of which a sick man should drink deep, or not at all.

Despite his wasted health, Renan could not make up his mind to desert the College even for a season. Before the month was out he returned to resume his course of Hebrew. On the return journey, at Dijon, he took a chill. And after that, again, he was less well all winter.

Those who knew him as well as I did will never forget his quiet heroism, his unassuming devotion, all through the first *semestre* of 1892. With my eyes shut, I can still see the heavy quaint figure painfully descending the steep stairs of the College, and serenely accosting, with oppressed breath, but without complaint, the colleagues he directed, with a smile. He delivered his lectures with exactitude. He presided over the Asiatic Society. He completed his studies on the Mediæval Rabbis for the Academy of Inscriptions;—and this was a great joy. On Friday evenings, in his wife's *salon*, his friends found him willing to converse with them on any subject. His unimpaired curiosity continued to interrogate the universe. He was dying, but he had not abdicated.

At midsummer he moved with his family to the Breton coast. And for a while things went well with him. He loved his calm manor of Rosmapamon, the fresh quiet country, with its green fields and spinnies, its commons golden

with gorse, its great granite rocks, its sombre and splendid sea. It was there, perhaps, that he spent his happiest days. "My ideal"—(he says in the *Eau de Jouvence*, speaking as usual through the lips of Prospero).—"My ideal would be an old patriarchal country house, full of children singing, full of lads and lasses light of heart, where everyone would eat, drink, and be merry at my expense." Rosmapamon supplied his kind old age with that hospitable holiday. There were long quiet mornings for work: evenings in which the tired enchanter saw, as he wished, the young people unchecked by his presence in their merry-making. In the afternoons, in the long, lazy, summer afternoons, almost every day he went a little walk, leaning on his wife's arm. He would sit on a bank by the side of a field, and look placidly over the Celtic landscape which he had loved in childhood—of which he felt himself an animate part. But there was one thing he loved more than Nature, and that was knowledge; the service of Truth. When, at the end of September, he had an attack of the heart, he said to Madame Renan: "Take me back to the College." And there on the 12th of October 1892, he died at his post.

He died happy. His mind kept to the end its

serene lucidity, his temper its kind sweetness unalloyed by personal repining. All he asked was that his illness should put nothing out of its due order, that his death should cost no excessive grief—the only thing in which his wife ever disobeyed him. "I have done my work," he said to Madame Renan, "I die happy." And again he said, "It is the most natural thing in the world to die: let us accept the Laws of the Universe"—and he added: "the heavens and the earth remain."

So he passed away, and his death struck France with a sort of stupor. He was the greatest man of genius our generation had known: in style, sentiment, poetry of feeling no less a Master than Victor Hugo; in history and philosophy the compeer of Taine; in philology the heir of Burnouf. There was scarce one branch of thought in France but it was impoverished by his disappearance.

He was buried with great honours. The grey old College was decked as for a national festivity. The best and wisest men in France bade a public farewell to his sacred ashes. There had been a question of laying him to rest under the dome of the Panthéon. At the last moment the Government feared the protest of the Right at the

opening of the Chambers. And the great Idealist had not where to lay his head. . . . His wife buried him with her people in the vault of the Sheffers at Mont-Martre. But where he should have lain, where he would have wished to lie, is in the small, green space which the cloister of Tréguier encloses. "It is there I would sleep," he said once, "under a stone engraved with these words—

Veritatem Dilexi."

Who knows? the day may dawn when the Church of his youth may yet accept the guardianship of the grave of Ernest Renan.

"All religions are vain (he said), but religion is not vain." . . . "Let us not abjure our Heavenly Father. Let us not deny the possibility of a final justice. Perchance we have never known one of those tragic situations where God is the sole Confidant, the necessary Consoler. . . . Where else shall we seek the true witness, if not on high? How often have we felt the need of an appeal to Absolute Truth; how often we would cry to it: 'Speak! Speak!' Who knows? At that instant we were, perhaps, on the threshold of Truth. But the strange thing is that nothing

shows if our protestations have found a hearing. When Nimrod shot his arrows into Heaven, they came back to him tipped with blood. We have never received any response at all. O God, whom we adore in spite of all, Thou art in truth a Hidden God!"[1]

These were almost the last written words of Ernest Renan. They are characteristic. They might be taken from his earliest pages. Instinct and Reason speak to us in different voices, equally imperious, equally insistent; only we are most of us a little deaf with one ear! But Renan lost no word of either of these eternal monitors. There is his secret, there his charm, there the peculiar value of his genius. But therein also the something unconvinced—or only momentarily convinced—which leaves his purest harmonies for ever unresolved. We know that, in one other moment, he will hear the other Voice, he will deliver a different message: *le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait pas.* One lobe of his brain is continually engaged in supplementing the thoughts produced by the other: we can imagine them as two mirrors so placed as to show the opposing faces of the object they reflect. Fortunately this variety is saved from chaos by certain dominating

[1] Preface to *Feuilles Détachées.*

principles which remain unaltered in the midst of mutability.

Religion may or may not be true; it is not vain; even though it answer to no supernatural reality. Our conscience is a moral fact as important as our reason, and the man who says "I ought" as superior to the savage as the man who says "I reflect."

The Good exists; and indeed we may say that it alone exists. Evil is transitory. In its different forms of Truth, Virtue, Knowledge, Beauty, the Good endures and accumulates, and, by the impulse of its own force, must develop more and more. "The world's our oyster": slowly, surely, it secretes the inevitable pearl which may survive it. Meanwhile Evil is with us certainly. We suffer, we are oppressed by material circumstances, we may even die before our time in anguish and never bring forth the fruit which we were destined to produce. Yet the construction of the universe allows for infinite waste. Other germs will bear; all will not be blasted. Evil is a sort of moral carbonic acid gas, mortal when isolated and a real danger to our existence; and yet, when combined with other forces, not only innocuous, but even necessary to our vital powers, in the present state of their development. The important thing in life is not our misery, our despair,

however crushing, but the one good moment which outweighs it all. Man is born to suffer, but he is born to hope. And the message of the universe still runs, as of old: *αἴλινον, αἴλινον, εἶπε, τὸ δ' εὖ νικάτω.*

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