

THE  
CHURCHMAN

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ART. I.—M. RENAN.

NO branch of literature is more popular in our time than biography. In our lending libraries and railway bookstalls biographies compete with novels. The lives and letters of our leading statesmen and scholars are published as soon as materials can be collected from various quarters, and, before the interest attaching to their names has passed away, we are able to judge of their character and of the events with which they have been associated, from their own point of view, and with such expositions of their motives and principles as a friendly biographer may discover in unpublished documents or in the unrestrained intercourse of confidential correspondence. In one or two rare instances the work of the biographer has been anticipated. The distinguished man whom the public delights to honour has collected the materials for the biographer, put them together, and invited the whole world to contemplate the various phases of his life, to trace the growth and development of his character, and the separate influence of each successive stage in his career, as they appear to himself, looking back on them from perhaps the threshold of old age. Thus he himself is able, in some measure, to anticipate the verdict of posterity, and to value the work of his life, as it will hereafter appear to those who contemplate it from a distance.

The "Recollections" of M. Renan<sup>1</sup> will take a unique, but not a very high place in this department of literature. The student who passed his boyhood and youth in the seclusion of various ecclesiastical seminaries with a view to enter the Romish priesthood, and the larger part of whose subsequent

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<sup>1</sup> *Souvenirs d'Enfance et de Jeunesse*. Par ERNEST RENAN. Paris: Calmann Levy. 1883.

life has been spent in publishing books which have given a greater shock to the creed of Christendom—Reformed as well as Papal—than any other writings of this century, cannot fail to tell us many things of a career full of startling changes and unexpected incidents which thousands will delight to read. No living writer can clothe his thoughts in words more appropriately chosen and gracefully combined. The fascination of his style, its transparent clearness, and the peculiar beauty and aptness of its illustrations, cannot fail to attract thousands of admiring readers in England, no less than in France. He traces the influences which have moulded his character, and have so completely altered its direction, that the favourite disciple of Dupanloup and the enthusiastic student of Aquinas has become the vehement opponent of supernatural religion and the popular champion of the philosophy of Comte.

He tells of his ancestors and of the share which each of his parents contributed to his character, of the physical features of his native province, the credulity of his infancy, the books he read or was forbidden to read, the growth of scepticism, the gradual settling down into permanent unbelief, until he felt that he was no longer a Christian, and could no longer wear the dress which marked his destination for the priesthood. But the temper and training of the *Seminarist* have never left him. He delights to find in these early days the germs of later development—the promise of future greatness. He is still “a priest spoiled.” Sometimes he seems to himself like the submerged city, the towers and spires of which the Breton fisherman sees under the calm sea. Sometimes he listens to the vibrations which come from infinite depths like voices from another world. Sometimes these “Recollections” are like a carillon of bells repeating the old melodies, and bringing back the echoes of a far-off time. Sometimes he is like the harp of Orpheus, which, after the hand which swept it had passed away, continued to repeat the name of the ideal which had been loved and lost.

The lost ideal haunts him still. The religion of his childhood has been left behind in the Breton village, where “the things which men pursued elsewhere were called ‘vanity,’ and the things which *lay* people called ‘chimeras’ were the only realities.” Christianity and Clericalism were convertible terms, and Renan abandoned both at the same time. He has never since taken the trouble to inquire whether the legends of Brittany and the tricks which used to be played with the wooden figure at Tréguier are to be placed on the same level with the Resurrection of Christ. Nay; he takes care to warn his readers that they have no choice. If they accept the supernatural in one case, they must be prepared to accept it

in all. As for himself, he cannot accept as true what he knows to be false, nor "amputate his reason" in order to preserve his faith. He describes the struggles through which he passed—the attempts to silence, to bribe, to coerce him, but never to show that faith in Christ is compatible with reason.

No confession could be more interesting than his explanation of the various influences which drove the disciple of Dupanloup farther and farther away from the unsuspecting faith of his childhood, until he became the most formidable enemy to Christianity that has arisen, even in France, since the days of Voltaire. He assures us that he has been impelled simply by the love of truth, and that no other motive than the desire to get rid of a position, the falschood of which was intolerable, has compelled him to abandon the hopes of his early years, by severing himself from friends whom he dearly loved, and to whose memory he still clings with a tenacity of affection which lapse of time and dissolution of faith has not weakened. But the change was inevitable, for, the student of Locke, and Reed, and Herder and Hegel (and with such writers he became familiar even while he was a candidate for the Romish priesthood) could never bow to the decrees of an infallible Church, nor preach a pilgrimage to Lourdes. He found no resting-place between the extremes of ecclesiastical infallibility and hopeless scepticism. The student of Romish Divinity looks in vain for such books as Butler, Barrow, or Taylor. Of those Renan seems never to have heard. They might, under God, have changed the whole course of his life. But the strong bias of his early training; the church-towers dear to his childhood, destroyed, but not forgotten; the music of the bells, to which he listens in the quiet hours of declining life; recall the lost ideals of his infancy and childhood, and still dominate his spirit. He has never ceased to love what he has helped to destroy.

In all his writings there is an apparent unconsciousness of the gravity of the question, a frivolity of manner, and a tendency to exaggerate, to sacrifice truth and reality to picturesque grouping and dramatic effect, which, though not without precedent in the great writers of the Continent (as in the somewhat similar case of Goethe), is unbecoming in any case, and especially in a book professing to be a picture of the author's religious convictions. In a work of fiction, or in the lighter literature of the day, such a mode of treatment is not perhaps unbecoming, but in the personal recollections of a great man published during his life it is strange to be reminded that the author's own words are to be taken *cum grano*

*salis*.<sup>1</sup> No doubt very much of the charm of this book, as well as of the other writings of M. Renan, is due to his selecting those incidents which lend themselves most readily to picturesque description and rhetorical treatment. But it is evident that the real value of his writings as contributions to the history of religion and commentaries on the life of Christ is completely destroyed by this continual straining after effect, by his unfair selection of facts and tests, and by his avowed object to reject everything supernatural or miraculous.

The publication of the "Vie de Jésus" caused the greatest consternation in clerical circles on the Continent. In a crisis of extreme political and military excitement, it was the chief topic of conversation in the *salons* of Paris, the churches of Italy, and the counting-houses of the Levant. It was the occasion of "reparation services" in the cathedrals of every Roman Catholic country. But no serious attempt was made to meet the crisis by appealing to reason and history, and so exposing the many fallacies and misstatements of the dreaded book. Denunciations, and reparation services, and warnings of the faithful against pestilential books have been tried in abundance; but only with the effect of increasing its popularity, and making everyone believe that it is unanswerable. In France this reckless and infatuated policy has borne bitter fruit, and the Church of Rome finds herself, not as in Germany or in England fighting with believers of another creed, but with men who disbelieve all creeds, who preach a scientific crusade against all Churches, and who would gladly suppress every public expression of the Christian faith in churches and hospitals and schools, as well as in the public ordinances of Christian worship. By the recent laws of education in France every teacher is tolerated except the priest; chaplains in the army and chaplains in hospitals are to be removed. And if the Church of France were disestablished, the French bishops believe that whole departments would be left without the ordinances of religion; so that a whole generation would grow up to whom the name of Christ would be practically unknown. The laws recently passed in France are not only anti-Papal, but vehemently anti-Christian. It would be unjust to attribute this catastrophe to any one cause, or to any one man; but the works of Renan, unrefuted and therefore supposed to be triumphant, are regarded by the popular party as the sign as well as the cause of its triumph.

That the tricks of designing priests (such as are described in this book), who tell the people that the wooden statue of a

<sup>1</sup> "Bien des choses ont été mises, afin qu'on sourie; si l'usage l'eût permis, j'aurais dû écrire plus d'une fois à la marge—*Cum grano salis*." (Preface, p. iv.)

saint stretches out its arms to bless the devout worshippers in the village church, and refuses to perform the expected miracle if anyone is profane enough to look up at the appointed moment, have anything (except the name) in common with the miracles of the New Testament, one would have thought to be a self-evident truism. But the intellectual somnolency induced by studying the fables of saints, and the mixture of imposture and credulity in all those men's lives who are the agents and exhibitors of such palpable deceptions, destroy the faculty of discrimination, and make men judge the life of Christ as if He were no better than a mediæval saint or the manipulator of the movements of a wooden statue. There could not be a worse training than this for the man who was afterwards to become the interpreter of the New Testament, nor a more misleading standpoint from which to contemplate the life of Christ and the miracles recorded in the Gospels. The New Testament is removed, by the whole diameter of human thought, from the stories of the mediæval saints and from the tricks of their modern worshippers.

M. Renan tells us (without any apparent consciousness of the irony of the combination, and of the light which it throws on his own fitness for the task of criticizing the Gospels) that he understands better than any other man the life of Christ and of St. Francis! If he understands the one, we may be quite certain that he does not understand the other; and if he admires the life and character and teaching of Christ, we are at a loss to know how he can find the embodiment of the same divine ideal in the life and legend of the founder of the Franciscans, or by what method of interpretation he can discover the rules of this Order in the commands of Christ. But here we have the ex-Seminarist—the *spoiled priest*, the dreamer who listens for the old bells, and sees in the waters which have swept away his old beliefs the church towers and spires of his childhood. He puts his ear to the trembling vibrations which seem to come from infinite depths, “like voices from another world.” The echoes are confusing. But only the associations of such a childhood as his could have blended in one common eulogy the names of “JESUS and FRANCOIS D’ASSISE.”

It is impossible to say what effect this book of “Recollections” may have on the admirers of M. Renan. But it throws a strange light on the history of his life, and helps us to understand some of the perplexing inconsistencies and contradictions of his other writings. In his infancy he had witnessed the clumsy tricks by which the priest of his native village had taught him to believe in the miraculous powers of the Church. Legends equally absurd and equally dishonest formed the

staple of the education of his boyhood. In his opening manhood he was taught that the miracles of the New Testament were to be placed on the same level with these, and that all were to be equally accepted on the authority of an infallible Church. Therefore he came to study the life of Christ with the conviction that all miracles were to be rejected everywhere and at all times as incredible, irrational, and absurd. Even the books in which such things were to be found were not to be treated like other books. "An inspired book is a miracle. It ought to present itself under such conditions as no other book." One can understand these words coming from the lips of one who believes in revelation. In the pages of Bishop Butler, for instance, we see at once the propriety of his reminding us that principles of interpretation which may be applied to other books cannot always be applied to the Bible, because it refers to an incomprehensible system of which we must be incompetent judges. So Christians accept many passages in the Bible, not because they understand them, but because they have already accepted the Bible as a revelation from God.

In our endeavours to ascertain the meaning of revelation we employ all the resources of learning and industry. We press into this service all the discoveries of scholars and travellers, who may represent more vividly the countries and scenes described by the Evangelists. And in this way the "*Vie de Jésus*" itself may help us to make the Gospels more real, so as to bring before our imagination the geographical features of Palestine, and the feuds of the religious and political parties in Galilee and Jerusalem. We can accept also, so far as it goes, his testimony to the character of Christ; and we shall have little trouble in showing that the moral difficulties of his theory are not only irreconcilable with the Gospels, but vastly greater than belief in the miracles which he rejects.

We cannot, indeed, ask those who do not share this belief to respect our convictions, and to admit that there may be some things which, while they never contradict science or morality or reason, are to be accepted on the authority of God. But we have a right to ask that men who disbelieve in miracles shall not, under the plea of a mocking reverence for the miraculous, examine the Gospels under conditions which no historical records could satisfy. Let them not display such wantonness of capricious selection and arbitrary criticism in interpreting St. Matthew and St. John, as would not be tolerated for a moment in a commentator on Plato or Thucydides. For disbelievers in revelation the difference between inspired and uninspired books does not exist.

But there are some disputed points in connection with the Gospels on which the testimony of M. Renan may be worth

much. In some matters, where prejudice against the miraculous has not led him astray, he has borne strong testimony to the truth; and his researches have sometimes led him to results which are irreconcilable with other portions of his writings. He believes that St. Luke was the author of the Acts of the Apostles and of the third Gospel. He admits the general historical character of the first and second Gospels, and he finds ample evidence that the author of the fourth Gospel had personal knowledge of the facts of Christ's life. It is evident that nothing but the predetermination to reject the miraculous under all circumstances, and by whatever evidence attested (the growth of which prejudice he has now enabled us to trace), has kept him in many places from accepting the words of the Evangelists in their plain meaning. His single rule has been to get rid of the miraculous at whatever cost, and to accept any theory of the life of Christ which will exclude the divine and miraculous, and do as little violence as possible to those parts of the text which he is compelled to admit. He tells us that the Gospels are purely legendary, "for the reason that they are full of miracles." "It is not in the name of this or that philosophy, but in the name of a constant experience that we banish miracles from history. We do not say that a miracle is impossible, but that no miracle has ever been proved." He admits that the record of miracles cannot be taken out of the Gospels. The only question is whether these miracles were real or pretended.

He assumes that the miracles of Jesus were an after-thought, an expedient to which He was driven by the expectation of the multitude, which demanded miracles from the Messiah. Every reader of the Gospels must know that this theory is irreconcilable with many passages of the Sacred Text. It is not to be determined by simply begging the question and assuming that no miracles have ever been performed. It is an historical question—as to the personality of Christ, whether this theory be consistent with all else that we know of Him; as to the character of the disciples and the multitude in whose presence the miracles are said to have been performed; as to the enemies of Christ—by none of whom the imposture was detected; and as to the effect of these miracles on the whole world, and their place in the propagation of Christianity, and the foundation of the Church.

Physical difficulties are not the only difficulties in this case. In reference to these, indeed, we may confidently challenge those who deny them on the ground of science to show that any of them is impossible, if belief in Christ as a Divine Person be conceded. The miracles are only part of a manifestation, every part of which is equally superhuman. They cannot and ought

not to be judged separate from the whole character of Him Who is said to have performed them, nor separate from the whole tenor of His teaching, nor from the authority which He claimed. To such a case the argument from general experience of mankind does not apply. Experience is gathered from the actions and powers of men. If anyone ever lived in the world possessing higher powers than man, as we believe of Christ, the inferences drawn from the powers of other men and from the limits of such powers are not applicable to Him. You may make the tests of so wonderful a belief as rigorous as you please (and we shall not shrink from their application), but you have no right to dismiss it as incredible, nor to assume without examination that it *cannot* be true. But this is what men do when they judge the life of one claiming to be Divine, by precedents drawn from the history of mankind. "What think ye of Christ?" is still the main question of all theology. This cannot be answered without taking into account the uniqueness of His Personality, the sublimity and tenderness of His character, and the purity of His teaching, as well as His superhuman works, and the superhuman results which have followed from His life.

M. Renan stints not his admiration of the character of Christ: "He was the highest consciousness of God that has ever existed in the bosom of humanity." "A living creative genius entirely differing from anything in Judaism." Elsewhere he enlarges on "the splendid originality of Jesus in His conception of God as a Father—as Our Father in Heaven." "This is His grand act of originality; in this He owes nothing to His race." "We have not left behind, we shall never leave behind the essential idea which Jesus created." It seems incredible that the man who wrote these words should have said, also, that Christ (we quote the words with reluctance) was a "thaumaturgist and an exorcist in spite of Himself." Certainly, "the grain of salt" with which the reader is permitted to season the "Souvenirs," must be applied in large quantities to everything else which Renan has written. In their plain meaning, these words are absolutely irreconcilable and contradictory. The highest consciousness of God in the bosom of a thaumaturgist! The creative genius—the splendid originality—the unapproachable perfection of the man who became an exorcist *in spite of Himself!*

This, moreover, is the writer who, looking back on these his earlier writings, tells us, in his latest book, that "*he alone of his age has been able to comprehend Jesus*" (p. 148). Few men would be prepared to assert so much of themselves. Few men have given so many and so conspicuous proofs of their own incompetence.



There is, in truth, an affectation of enthusiasm, a want of manliness, an inability to appreciate real nobility of character and inflexibility of purpose, all of which show him to be eminently unfitted by nature and by education to understand the nobility and moral strength of our Lord. Of this he himself discloses the secret. From a very early age he preferred the society of girls to boys. "The latter did not like me, as I was too effeminate for them. We could not play together, so they called me 'Mademoiselle,' and teased me in a variety of ways. On the other hand, I got on very well with girls of my own age." For such a person it is easier to understand weakness than strength; and so he draws his imaginary Christ with all his own contradictions, imagining Christ to be such an one as himself, or perhaps Francois d'Assise.

Of all persons in the world, we should say that an exceptionally effeminate French rhetorician, self-confident, egotistic, emotional, and irreverent, is the least likely to understand the life of Christ. To the popular leaders of His day Christ said: "How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another?" M. Renan sets every sail to catch the breeze of popular favour. His idol is popular applause, and to this he delights to sacrifice his independent judgment as a man of letters and an historian. "Public applause is the grand corrupter," he says. "It encourages me to do evil. It leads the writer to commit faults for which it blames him afterwards: like the respectable *bourgeoisie* of former times, which applauded the actor and expelled him from the Church. When I am well pleased with myself I am approved by ten persons; when I let myself run to perilous confidences, when my literary conscience hesitates, and where my hand trembles, thousands implore me to go on." It is not enough to say that this is in the worst taste. The writer has no proper sense of the dignity of his work as a public teacher, nor of his responsibility as a man of genius and an interpreter of history. It is no little strange that he should claim to understand the life of Christ, and to sit in judgment on the words of the Evangelists.

"*Je suis un prêtre manqué.* My faults are priests' faults; my virtues are the virtues of my early training." We have seen the gravest of the *faults* of his early training—as they will appear to most Englishmen, especially to English men of letters. Among the *virtues*—as they probably appear to himself and to many of his countrymen—is his contempt for the Protestants as well as for the Roman Catholics who have tried to defend their ecclesiastical system and their belief on any other grounds than the simple appeal to authority. "One of the worst intellectual dishonesties," he says, "is to play upon

words, to present Christianity as imposing scarcely any restraint on the reason, and by the help of this artifice to attract to it people who do not know to what they are really pledging themselves. . . . *Whoever has gone through his theology* is no longer capable of such a want of logic. As all rests for him upon the infallible authority of the Church, there is no room left for choice. One single dogma abandoned, one single teaching of the Church rejected, is the negation of the Church and of Revelation." This is the Nemesis of rejected infallibility. Renan is a priest 'still, though "a spoiled priest." He has never forgotten the logic of the schoolmen. He has been welcomed, indeed, as the most learned, as he is certainly the most eloquent exponent of infidelity in Europe. Though his book has been received by the Church of his youth with horror, so as to be the occasion of "services of reparation" innumerable, in the country of his birth he fancies himself again in the halls of St. Sulpice, and listening to the old text-books of the Jesuits. "WHOEVER HAS GONE THROUGH HIS THEOLOGY IS INCAPABLE OF SUCH LOGIC." The slave is not free who drags after him a portion of his chain. The scholastic logic is the only protection against the theology of Protestants; that is, against the opinion that the Church has fallen into a single error. If such be his virtues and such his logic, they are the virtues and the logic of his early training. Here also we see the source of the strongest and most mischievous of all his delusions, that the believer in revelation is required "to *amputate the faculty of reason*, and renounce for ever the search after truth."

This is a part of his Seminarist theology—almost the only part which remains with him still—and still poisons everything that he writes. If the Bible had been regarded by Dupanloup and his other patrons as intended for any higher purpose than to be a book "to furnish fine passages for their speeches" he would have found there the antidote. He would have seen that unreasoning credulity is not, in the estimation of the Apostles, the same thing, but the very opposite of Christian faith. He would have found that St. Paul's hearers are praised for comparing his teaching with Scripture, and that St. Peter charged his converts to be always ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them.

Having read these memoirs, we shall be better able to judge of the present religious condition of France and of its prospects. This is dark and discouraging in many ways. In none more than in this, that many of the leaders of French thought—the brilliant writers who draw multitudes after them by an irresistible fascination—have never learned to distinguish be-

tween the purity of the Gospel and the corrupt theology and lying legends of St. Sulpice and Lourdes.

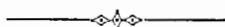
It is perhaps not difficult to understand the panic which the publication of M. Renan's famous book produced twenty years ago in France. The sphere of its influence has not been contracted, nor its power diminished since that time. A Church which appeals only to authority, and which claims to be the inheritor of supernatural power, can only refurbish its old weapons and trade on the fears and superstitions of mankind. But the danger arising from such books as this comes not from any new discovery of science or of criticism, nor from any greater cogency of argument. To answer them by threats and denunciations only is to choose to meet them in a field where they are sure to conquer, and to leave them in secure possession of the only ground from which they are easily dislodged, and where, in the estimation of all competent judges, defeat would be final and irretrievable. The life of Renan is exceptional only in the influence which flows from his genius and his popularity. It is probably an example of hundreds of similar lives of which the world never hears.

On the whole, the impression left on the mind by the *Souvenirs* is very painful. There is an utter want of any real effort to grapple with the difficulties, or even to understand the momentous issues involved in the truth of Christianity. He abandoned the Christian faith, he says, because he was unable to reconcile certain discrepancies in the four Gospels. To those who have read his writings it is evident that he entered on this inquiry with the predetermination to make the most of any apparent contradictions, and to deny to the Evangelists that fairness of construction which would be readily conceded in every other case; as, for instance, when he assumes that St. John did not know any of those events in Christ's life which he has not himself expressly recorded, like Christ's birth in Bethlehem and the Ascension. He never raises the question whether such events were already known to the readers of the Gospels, and taken for granted in other parts of the Gospel of St. John, but rushes to the conclusion that the writer *must* have been ignorant of that which he does not mention.

Perhaps such a spirit might have been permitted in discussing a question of pure literature, such as the authorship of the Homeric poems, the personality of Homer, or the various discrepancies and contradictions of the "Iliad"—though even literary criticism should be conducted in a more honest and appreciative spirit. But the truth of Christianity is not a matter of criticism, of literary taste, or of artistic excellence. The Bible was not given to furnish models for rhetorical declamation. Whatever be the literary reputation of its critics,

such capacity is not the highest, still less is it the sole qualification for understanding the life of Jesus. It is no slight confirmation of the truth of the Gospels that they have exerted from the most unfriendly and unsympathizing critics the highest praise. But Christian faith is not a matter of criticism nor of literature. Its truths are not critically and artistically, but morally and spiritually, discerned. They are remedial and restorative. They speak peace and pardon to hearts burdened with the weight of sin and sorrow. "The secret of the Lord is for them that fear Him." The life of Christ is not to be written nor understood unless by those who keep in view the purpose for which St. John tells us that he wrote his Gospel: "That we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, we might have life through His Name."

WILLIAM ANDERSON.



## ART. II.—IN THE YOSEMITÉ VALLEY.

ALREADY a week has slipped by since the beautiful May morning when I woke to find myself in the heart of these glorious mountains; and already I have learnt to feel thoroughly at home in the pleasant little wooden bungalow which is here dignified with the title of "Hotel." It stands on the brink of the calm Merced river, facing the most worshipful Yosemite Falls, in a lovely green valley, encompassed on every side by stupendous rock-walls of the whitest granite.

All arrangements here are of the simplest: everything is quite comfortable, but there is nothing fine, and it is amusing to watch the evident disappointment of some American ladies on first arriving at "The Hotel," a word which, to them, conveys only the idea of such vast palaces as those we saw in San Francisco, one of which provides sleeping accommodation for a thousand persons, and every detail is ordered on a scale of downright magnificence. As multitudes of American families avoid the troubles of housekeeping by having no "home," but only permanent apartments on one of the many flats of these huge buildings, the hotel becomes a substitute for home, and affords a standard of measurement for American ideas of things in general. No wonder that they are on so large a scale!

In comparison with these "palaces" this little wooden house may well seem simple! The main bungalow, which is surrounded by a wide veranda, has on the ground-floor, first,