

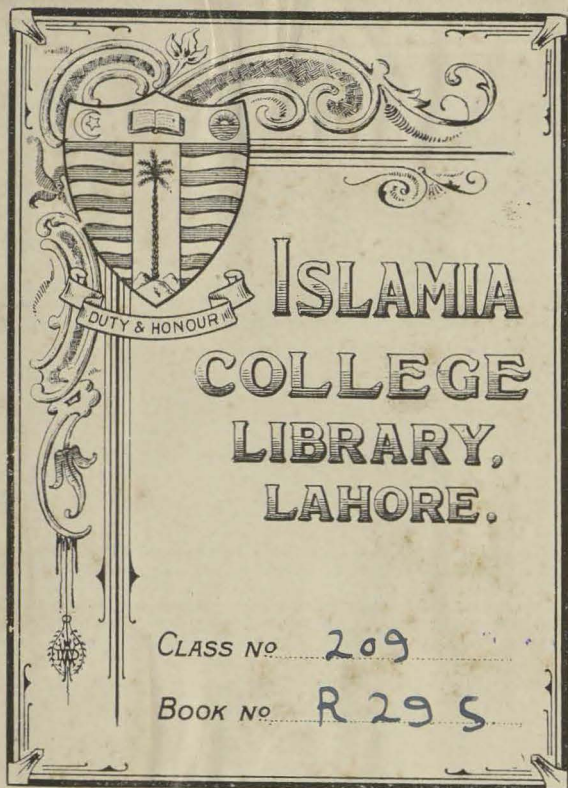


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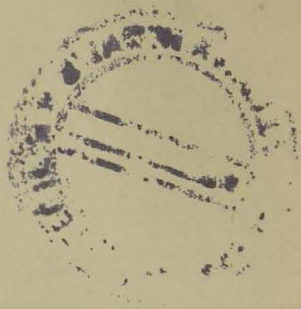
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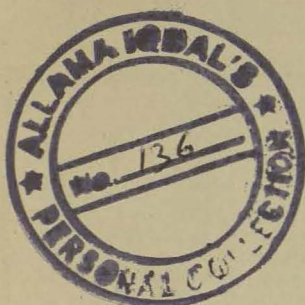


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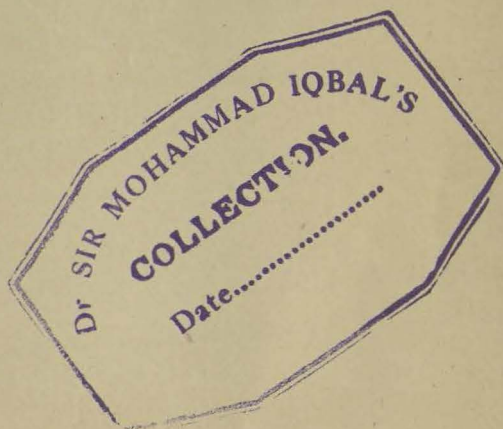
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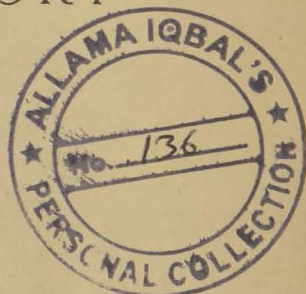
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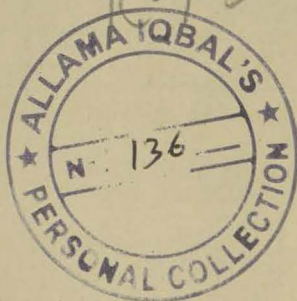
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(Research)







## P R E F A C E

THE custom of collecting into volumes, essays which have been published in periodicals—a custom which many persons regard as indicative of a vexatious tendency in contemporaneous literature—is the inevitable consequence of the importance which reviews and the literary parts of some of the daily papers have assumed for some years past. It would be useless to reprint them as mere reports, designed simply to announce a work, and not confined to any particular study; but from the moment when these criticisms, right or wrong, have ceased to be extracts and analyses, and have themselves become works, we can hardly blame the author when he desires to give a more lasting publicity to those fragments, which have oftentimes cost him more research and reflection than an original book. Perhaps this new kind of literature will be looked on, in the future, as something peculiar to our age, and consequently something in which our age has best succeeded. I do not stay to inquire whether this is a eulogium, or a criticism on the times, or on ourselves; it is sufficient if the fashion is admitted to be one of the most important forms of intellectual production at the present time, so that those authors who gather their works together cannot be accused of misplaced pretensions and an exaggerated idea of their own works—possibly of little merit—but to which they have devoted all their care.

It is very true that the volumes thus formed, if one

regards them as books, sin grievously against the rules of regular composition and against the laws of unity. But then, when one has endeavoured, like as in this work now presented to the public, to collect analogous works according to the subject forming a whole, it is impossible but that the fragments artificially brought together should present some features peculiar to a periodical, which they would not have done, had they been prepared originally for a book. This would appear, above all, in the fragments now reproduced: some parts may be of a date somewhat ancient. Without disavowing anything, we can hardly read again fragments written eight years ago, when those years have been occupied by an idea, not very active, which presented the details in a somewhat different manner. Two rules ought to be observed in the reproduction of these kinds of essays: on the one side, it would be objectionable in the author if he thought he was obliged to change the original character of his work, and to bring it back exactly to the form which he would have given to it if he had composed it for the first time; on the other hand, the respect due to the reader forbids the publication of a work which is capable of being rendered less imperfect. I have sought to reconcile these two duties, and I believe I can say that the present volume, whilst containing all the fragments written a long time ago (besides, if we consider the events which have happened since their publication), includes nothing which does not accord with my present opinions. These observations apply particularly to the essay upon the Critical Historians of Jesus, and to some other pages composed in a manner different from that which I have since adopted. I cannot say that at the present time I shall write pages such as they are; however, I sign them again without any scruple, because they offer nothing which, as it seems to me, does not conform to the truth.

The excellent custom of *Retractationes*,<sup>1</sup> so ingenuously practised in former times, no longer finds place among our literary manners. This criticism of one's self, which, with a little sincerity, should bear so much fruit, both for the author and the public, would be regarded nowadays as a refinement of vanity, and the writer who should practise it would indubitably suffer for his candour by the wrong he would do to himself as an authority. Theological dogmatism has led us to such a narrow idea of the truth, that whoever does not pose as an infallible authority risks the loss of all credit among his readers. The scientific mind, proceeding by delicate approximations, gradually grasping the truth, incessantly modifying formulas to bring them to an expression more and more strict, changing the points of view, that nothing may be overlooked in the infinite complexity of the problems presented in the universe, is in general but little understood, and its proceeding passes for an acknowledgment of want of power or of versatility. At the risk of exposing myself to these same reproaches, but thoroughly resolved not to sacrifice one iota of that which I believe to be true, to a vain pretension of infallibility, I shall here make two observations, of which the one concerns my religious conscience, the other my scientific conscience.

The article upon Channing, at the time of its publication, provoked on the part of his admirers some objections, of which in some respects I recognise the justice. Doubtless, in addressing themselves to me, they overlooked the expressions of sympathy I had used in speaking of the American reformer. I recognise, however, that the misunderstanding was founded, up to a certain point, upon the unequal pro-

<sup>1</sup> This word has not in Latin the sense which we attach to the word *retractation*: it indicates solely the work of the author resuming his task after a time, and noting the modifications which have been suggested during the progress of his thoughts.



portion allotted in the article to praise and to censure. Content with having expressed, once and for all, my admiration for the excellent work of Channing, and presenting on the other side, with much elaboration, the objections from which his system cannot, any more than others, pretend to escape, I could let myself be credited with the fact that I did not place it in the rank which it deserves, of being the best religious movement which the present age has seen. In writing the article, my mind was engrossed with the disappearance of great cultivation and great genius as being the price at which progress in material order, and even in order of a certain morality, is but too often purchased. The honest and reasonable philosophy of the American school appeared mean, compared with the breadth of Catholicism, and the grand manner, at once critical, philosophical, and poetical, of Germany. It has been impossible for me, on reperusal, to modify my first opinion upon this point, but I willingly add that it does not result in any reproach against Channing. Good things ought to be taken simply; each order of greatness has a predominance in part, and ought not to be compared to others. A philanthropist who, having to judge Goethe, should place him on a level with Vincent de Paul, would find in the greatest genius of modern times, nothing but an egotist who had done nothing for the happiness and moral amelioration of his contemporaries.

The article upon the Religions of Antiquity appears to me to be equally susceptible of further addition, since I knew that the work carried on in Germany on the comparative mythology of the Indo-European race—a work which did not exist, or which had not penetrated into France, at the time when I wrote my article. These works, the range of which does not seem to be as yet thoroughly understood, even by the authors, being brought together from parallel points of view to bear upon the



Semitic religions according to the formula in which I have had some part, ought to exhibit the religions of antiquity under an aspect somewhat different from that which the Symbolic school and the purely Hellenic school show by their works. The unity of the Indo-European race, in opposition to the Semitic race, acknowledged in their religion, as in their language, will serve hereafter as a basis for the history of the religions of antiquity. This does not touch the doctrine of the article in question, but it merely explains the silence I have preserved with regard to recent discoveries which constitute an epoch in science. If I have not tried to fill up this omission, it is because the discoveries of which I speak have not yet been sufficiently matured for presentation to the public as definite results.

The fragments which compose the present volume all relate to the history of religions, and will be found to embrace the principal forms with which religious sentiment has been clothed in ancient times, in the Middle Ages, and in modern days. These subjects have for me an attraction which I cannot conceal, and which I know not how to resist. Religion is certainly the highest and most interesting of the manifestations of human nature. Among all kinds of poetry, it is the one that best reaches the end essential to art, which is to raise man above the vulgar life and awaken in him the sense of his celestial origin. No part of the great instincts of the heart shows itself with better evidence. Even when one adopts in particular, the teaching of any of the great religious systems, they divide themselves, or they divide the world; from the whole of these systems results one fact, which constitutes to my mind the most consolatory guarantee of a mysterious future, where the race and the individual will find again their works and the fruit of their sacrifices.

A grave difficulty, I know, attaches to these studies,

and causes timid people to impute to the authors that they occupy themselves with tendencies and objects to which they are strangers. The essence of all religions is to exact absolute belief, and consequently to place themselves above common right, and to deny to the impartial historian all competence when he seeks to judge them. Religions, in effect, in order to sustain the pretension of being beyond reproach, are obliged to have recourse to a particular system of philosophic history, founded upon the belief of a miraculous intervention of the Deity in human affairs—an intervention made solely for their profit. Religions otherwise are not able to dispose freely of their past; the past must bend to the necessities of the present, and furnish a foundation for institutions more evidently brought about by the course of time. The critic, on the contrary, whose rule is to follow only sight, and fair deduction, without any political after-thought; the critic, whose first principle is that the miracle has no part in the course of human affairs, any more than in the series of natural facts; the critic, who begins by proclaiming that everything in history is capable of human explanation, even when that explanation escapes us by reason of insufficient teaching, would evidently not agree with the schools of theology, who employ a method opposed to his, and follow it with a different purpose. Susceptible, like all powers attributed to a divine source, religions naturally regard the expression, however respectful, of a difference of opinion as hostility, and look upon those as enemies, who place before themselves the most simple duties of reason.

This unfortunate misunderstanding, which will endure eternally between the critical spirit and the habitual doctrines imposed all of a piece, ought it to obstruct the human mind in the track of free research? We think not. Firstly, human nature never consents to mutilate itself; however one may conceive, perhaps, that reason



consents to its own sacrifice, if it finds itself in the face of a doctrine which is unique, and adopted by all mankind. But one set of systems claims the absolute truth, which all can possess at the same time; any one of these systems, showing a title by which it says it can reduce to nothing the pretensions of the others, the abdication of the critic will contribute nothing towards giving the world the benefit, so desirable, of peace and unanimity. In default of a conflict between religions and criticism, religions fight among themselves for the supremacy. If all the religions were reduced to a single one, the different fractions of that religion would each curse the other; and even supposing that all the sects came to recognise a sort of catholicity, the internal dissensions—twenty times more active and more hateful than those which separate religions and rival Churches—would serve to supply the eternal need which individual thought has to create, according to its fancy, the divine world. What are we to conclude from this? That in suppressing criticism we shall not suppress the cause, but we shall suppress perhaps the only judge who can clear up the difficulty. The right which each religion insists on as absolute truth is a perfectly respectable right, which no one ought to dream of contesting; but it does not exclude a parallel right in other religions, nor the right of the critic, who regards himself as outside the sects. The duty of civil society is to maintain itself in the face of all these contradictory rights, without seeking to reconcile them. That would be to attempt the impossible, and, without permitting them to be absorbed, nullify, which could not be done without detriment to the general interests of civilisation. It is as well to remark, that in effect the critic, in exercising, with regard to the history of religions, the right which belongs to him, does not encroach, so that one might complain, I do not say only from the point of view as to equality of rights

(that is too clear, since religious controversialists daily permit themselves to deliver against independent science attacks full of violence), but even in making concessions as large as possible to propriety and the majesty of established worship. Religion, at the same time that it reaches in its height the pure heaven of the ideal, stands for its base upon the unstable ground of human affairs, and participates in things which are fleeting and defective. Every work of which men furnish the matter being but a compromise between the opposing necessities which make up this transitory life, necessarily provides matter for the critic, and one has said nothing against an institution so much that one is limited to this inoffensive remark, that she has not completely escaped from the fragile nature which belongs to all structures here below. Religion must be of one manner, and not of another: that condition, essential to all existence, implies a limit—something excluded, a defect. Art, which, like religion, aspires to render the infinite under finite forms, does it renounce its mission because it knows of no image to represent the ideal? Does it not disappear in the vague and the intangible, whenever it would be as boundless in its forms as it is in its conceptions?

Religion, in the same way, only exists on the condition of its being a decided opinion, a fixed idea, very clear, very finite, and consequently very much liable to criticism. The narrow and peculiar side of each religion, which constitutes its weakness, constitutes also its strength; for men are drawn together by their narrow thoughts rather than by their enlarged ideas. It would be a small matter to have shown that every religious form is enormously disproportionate to its divine object, if one did not hasten to add that it could not be otherwise, and that every symbol must appear insufficient and coarse when compared with the extreme delicacy of the truths which it represents.



The glory of religion is precisely this: it provides a programme beyond human power for one to pursue the realisation with boldness, and to nobly make the attempt to give a determinate form to the infinite aspirations of the heart of man.

Eternal and sacred in their spirit, religions cannot be equally so in their forms and history; they would be mutilated in their fairest parts if they were obliged to regard the dogmatic exigency which does not permit the sects to own to their weak sides. What do I say? It should be suppressed; for the unreasonableness of different sects being contradictory, it would follow, in order that no one should be hurt, we ought to keep silence on the principal part of human development. In political affairs every government similarly affirms its right in an absolute manner, but no government has on that account forbidden history; at least those States which have carried superstition to this point have found in their moral deterioration, that they have brought about their own punishment. Spain offers a striking example of intellectual decay, traceable to the exaggeration of respect shown by the political to the religious order. On the contrary, the breadth of mind and intelligence which distinguish the Catholics of Germany, are owing still more to the constant contact with the Protestant critic than to the superiority of the Germanic race in all that pertains to the wise cultivation of the mind.

I protest once for all against the false interpretation which will be given to my works if the different essays upon the history of religions which I have published, or which I may in future publish, are taken as polemical works. Considered as polemical works, these essays (and I am the first to recognise the fact) are very unskilfully prepared. Polemics require a degree of strategy to which I am a stranger: one ought to know how to select the

weak side of one's adversary; to keep there, and never to touch upon any uncertain question; to keep every concession—that is to say, to renounce that which constitutes the very essence of the scientific spirit. Such is not my method. The fundamental question upon which religious discussion ought to turn—that is to say, the question of the fact of revelation and of the supernatural—I never touch;<sup>1</sup> not but that these questions may not be solved for me with complete certainty, but because the discussion of such questions is not scientific, or rather because independent science supposes them to have been previously settled. Certainly if I should pursue an end, whether of polemics or of proselytism, this would be a leading fault: it would be to bring upon the ground of delicate and obscure problems a question to be dealt with on much more evidence in the common terms which controversialists and apologists usually lay down. Far from regretting these advantages which I have given as against myself, I rejoice at it, if it will convince theologians that my writings are of another order to theirs; that they are the pure researches of erudition, assailable, as such, where one endeavours to apply those principles of criticism, equally to the Jewish religion as to the Christian, which one observes in the other branches of history and philology. As to the discussion of questions properly theological, I never enter upon it any more than MM. Burnouf, Creüzer, Guigniaut, and other critical historians of the religions of antiquity, who do not consider themselves obliged to undertake the refutation or the apology of the worships on which they employ themselves. The history of humanity is to me a vast entirety, where everything is unequal and

<sup>1</sup> Some passages of the article entitled *The Critical Historians of Jesus* are an exception to what I have said here, because this article was composed at a time when my manner of treating questions of religious history was not fixed as it is now.

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diverse, but where all is of the same order, arises out of the same causes, and obeys the same laws. These laws I search out with no other intention than to discover the exact shade or degree of that which is. Nothing will make me exchange a part so obscure, but productive to science, for the part of controversialist—an easy part in this, that it gains for the writer an assured favour from those who believe in the duty of opposing war to war. This polemic, of which I am far from disputing the necessity, but which is neither to my taste nor my ability, satisfied Voltaire. One cannot be at the same time a good controversialist and a good historian. Voltaire, if weak as a scholar—Voltaire, who seems to us so destitute of the sentiment of antiquity, to us who are educated according to a better method—Voltaire is twenty times victorious over adversaries still more unprovided with critical power than he is himself. The new edition which is in preparation of the works of this great man will satisfy the need which seems to exist for an answer to the invasions of theology—an answer evil in itself, but useful to those who engage in the contest; an answer much behind-hand to a science equally behind-hand. Let us do better; we all possess the love of truth and great curiosity. Let us leave debating to those who are pleased with it; let us work for the small number of those who march in the great line of the human spirit. Popularity, as I know, gives the preference to writers who, instead of pursuing the highest form of truth, apply themselves to combat the opinions of their times; but by a just return they have no value when the opinions they have combated have ceased to exist.

Those who refuted magic and judicial astrology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have rendered to reason an immense service, and yet, notwithstanding, their writings are unknown at the present day—their victory



has caused them to be forgotten. On the contrary, the names of Scaliger, Bochart, Bayle, Richard Simon—whose works are, however, obsolete upon many points of detail—will remain inscribed for ever among those of the great promoters of human knowledge.

The regrettable but necessary difference of opinion which will always exist upon the history of a religion between the partisans of that religion and disinterested science, ought not, then, to give occasion to accuse science of anti-religious proselytism. That if in a moment of passing impulse, a man devoted to critical research evinces something of the desire of St. Paul, "*Cupio omnes fieri qualis et ego sum*," there is a sentiment which effaces itself before a truer judgment of the limits and common range of the human spirit. Each person makes of religion a shelter to his measure and according to his needs. To dare to place hands upon this particular work of the faculties of each person is dangerous and rash, for no one has a right to penetrate deep enough into the conscience of another to distinguish the accessory from the principal. In seeking to extirpate beliefs which may be thought superfluous, one risks the injury of the organs essential to religious life and morality. Propagandism is out of its element when it undertakes high scientific culture or philosophy, and the most excellent intellectual discipline imposed upon persons who have not been prepared for it, cannot but have an evil effect. The duty of the learned man, then, is to express with frankness the result of his study, without seeking to trouble the conscience of persons who have not been called to the same life as himself, but also without regarding the interested motives and pretended proprieties which so often assume the expression of truth.

There is, moreover, a way by which the most austere critic, if he has some philosophy, can sympathise with those who have not the right to be as tolerant as he is.

He knows that with exalted beliefs disagreement almost always changes itself into anathema: if anathema excites repugnance, the motive which directs it induces respect, and thus the critic comes to understand, and almost to love, the anger he inspires.

This anger, indeed, taking for granted a certain pettiness of spirit, comes from an excellent source, the vivacity of religious sentiment. The worst penalty which man pays in order to arrive at a life of reflection atones for his exceptional position, and is without doubt when he finds himself isolated thus from the great family of the religious where the better souls of the world are found, and dreams that the persons with whom he would like best to be in moral communion are those who think they ought perforce to regard him as perverse. He ought to be well sure of himself, so as not to be troubled when the women and children join their hands and say, "Believe like us!" We may console ourselves by thinking that this schism between the simple and the cultivated, is a fatal law belonging to the state through which we are passing, and that there is a higher region for lofty souls in which we shall often meet, without doubting, those who have anathematised us, the ideal city seen by the Seer of the Apocalypse, where thronged a crowd none could count, of every tribe, every nation, every tongue, shouting with one voice the symbol in which they all met, "Holy, holy, holy is he who is, who has been, and who will be!"

The word *religion* being that under which, as it is here recapitulated in the eyes of the majority, the life of the spirit is comprised, a coarser materialism can only assail in its essence this happily eternal need of our nature. Nothing but our defective mode of speaking could confound with irreligion the refusal to adhere to such and such a creed professing to be as a revelation. The man who takes life seriously and employs his activity to a generous



purpose, he is the religious man ; the frivolous, superficial man, without any high morality, he is the impious man. Those who adore something are brothers, or certainly less hostile than those who obey only their own interests, and pretend, with material enjoyment, to have a right understanding of the divine instincts of the heart of man. The worst policy which religious passions can pursue is to seek in lightness or indifference, an ally against the dissenters, who seek the truth in good faith and according to the particular need of their soul.

For the great majority of mankind, the established religion provides all that is required towards the worship of the ideal. To suppress or weaken among the private classes, with their other means of education, this great and unique remembrance of nobleness, is to degrade human nature, and to take away the essential sign, which distinguishes it from the animal. The popular conscience, in its grand and high spontaneity, only attaches itself to the spirit, and not distinguishing the dross from the gold, sanctifies the most imperfect symbol. Religion is always true in the belief of the people ; for the people, not being theologians, and hardly entering into the details of dogma, only take that which is true ; I would say, the breath and the high-flown inspiration. In this sense the philosopher is much nearer in understanding with the man simple of heart than with the half-educated man who carries into religious matters a kind of left-handed reflection. How charming to see in cottages and in vulgar houses, where utility crushes everything, ideal figures, images which represent nothing real !

How delightful for the man bowed down by six days' toil, to come on the seventh and rest upon his knees and contemplate the lofty columns, the vaulted roof, the arches, the altar, to hear and appreciate the hymns, to listen to words, moral and consolatory ! The nourishment which

science, art, the elevating exercise of all his faculties, furnishes to the educated man, religion alone undertakes to supply to the illiterate. This elementary education, naturally brought to consider itself superior, has often the effect, I know, of dwarfing the minds confined by it. But the greater part of those dwarfed by religion are already small before they take to it; narrow and limited by religion, they would probably have been wicked without it. Intellectual elevation will always be the lot of the few: provided that the few should develop freely, they would hardly trouble themselves with the manner in which the remainder approached the sublimity of God. Whatever there may be scanty or even dangerous in an established dogma, it does not exist for the people who have no vocation to be critical; for see, why superstitions which are displeasing to the educated man have a charm for the common people. The simple faith is the true one, and I admit that I should be inconsolable if I knew that my writings would ever cause offence to one of those simple souls who worship so well in spirit. But they are protected by their ignorance: the dogmas which are assailed not being for them the object of positive assertion, no difficulty occurs to them; it is the privilege of pure sentiment to be invulnerable and to play with poisons without being hurt.

The lofty separation, sometimes the reproach of philosophy, established between men in relation to their religious capacities, is not in reality an injury to the majority nor an act of pride. Science, it is true, is not made for all: it presupposes a long intellectual education, years of study, mental ability, of which but few men are capable. But for all that, it does not exclude the ideal: the simple man finds in his spontaneous instincts full compensation for that which he wants on the side of reflection. Even then no one will believe that great intellectual cultivation, when it does not exclude religious sentiment, is superior to simple

faith. What is one to conclude? Inequality, at the bottom more painful to the privileged than to the inferior, is the fault of Nature. Mary has the better part; Martha may be blamed for it. The theological formula here preserves its perfect truth: all have sufficient grace to attain their salvation, but all are not called to the same degree of blessedness. Every man has his right to the ideal; but it would be falsifying evidence to pretend that all can equally participate in the worship of the perfect.

This distinction in religion, understood in its general sense, and the particular forms that history shows us succeeding one another with divers fortunes and divers merits, are essential to its maintenance. Far from seeking to weaken religious sentiment, I would help in some things, to elevate and purify it. It seems to me, indeed, that a consolatory result arises from the independent study of religion, which serves to calm the soul and furnish the foundation of a happy life. The result is, that religion, being an integral part of human nature, is true in its essence, and above particular forms of worship it is necessarily affected with the same defects which belong to the times and the country to which it belongs; such is religion—an evident sign that man has a superior destiny.

Thus it is demonstrated that religion always has been and always will be that which inspires more love and hatred: thus it is demonstrated that man, by an invincible effort, raises himself to the conception and to the worship of the perfect; is not this the best proof of the divine spirit which is in us, and which answers by its aspirations to a transcendent ideal? In my eyes, I confess it is not the most comforting thought; and it is here we ought to pronounce the word of certainty that there is not any particular dogma or any philosophical or theological formula, but what may be challenged. The infinite should not be shut up in a system. How will the human spirit



lay hold of it? how will it translate the word, the essence of which is ineffable? But this same impotence of language and of reason to exhaust the idea which we form of the divine world, is it not the greatest mark of adoration, the most significant act of faith? Far from leading us to a negation, the philosophical history of religion shows us the constant faith of humanity in a celestial principle and a supreme order, and thus brings us to faith; not that faith which materialises its object in coarse symbols, but that faith which believes in the ideal without the need of belief in the supernatural, and which, following the thought of St. Augustine, sees the divinity better in the immutable order of things than in derogations from the eternal order.

Some facts which pass under our eyes, and will count in the history of the human mind, confirm me in this method, at once respectful and free, of knowing how to distinguish the form which passes away, from the spirit which remains for ever. Some allowances, indeed, should be made for the seriousness and depth of the religious reaction which we have witnessed—a reaction, like all movements of opinion, very often made to serve as a pretext for inferior estimates and weaknesses; but we cannot deny that they hide a true event of moral order. If this reaction manifests itself almost everywhere under the form of conversion to Catholicism, it arises less from Catholicism itself than from the religious sentiment.

Catholicism being the most characteristic, and, if I dare say so, the most religious of religions, all religious reaction slightly tends necessarily to its profit. Let us say, however, that Catholicism, for the majority of those who return to it, is less the vast and minute mass of beliefs which fill the volumes of a treatise on theology, than religion in its general acceptation. Among the neophytes who attach themselves to it with most zeal, there are few who con-



sider seriously the dogmas they embrace; when these dogmas are exhibited to them under a strict form, they decline them, or they extenuate them by complaisant explanations: almost all are heretics without knowing it. What brings them to the Church is the eternal instinct which induces man to adopt a religious belief, an instinct so imperious that it will not allow him to rest in doubt, but makes him accept, without examination, the faith which he finds ready-made. The eighteenth century, which had the mission of clearing the field of the human mind from a crowd of obstacles with which it had become encumbered during the course of ages, carried on the work of demolition with an ardour which may be taken as the fulfilment of conscientious duty. Scepticism and impiety (or rather, the appearance of scepticism and impiety, for at bottom few ages have proceeded in their work with as much conviction and religious devotion) please him in themselves, and he enjoys a kind of content at having acquitted himself of a task which might otherwise have cost him many tears to accomplish. But the generation following, having returned to the inner life, has found in it the need of belief, and to be in communion of faith with other souls, no longer appreciates the joy of the first, and rather than remain in a state of negation which has become intolerable, has tried to take up again the very doctrines which their fathers had exploded. When we know no longer how to knock down churches we restore them, and we imitate the ancients; for we can let religious originality go, but we cannot let go religion. Who has not stopped, when exploring our ancient cities, before those gigantic monuments of former faith, which alone claim notice in the midst of the level of modern vulgarity? Everything is restored round about; the cathedral alone remains, a little degraded from its pre-eminence by the hand of man, but deeply rooted in the

soil. It is so far true that in the fact of religious creation, the ages are brought to refuse the privilege they accord so freely to remote times; it is so far true also that rational science being, by its nature, the lot of the few, cannot, in the actual state of society, press upon the belief of the world with any decided weight.

We may understand now what distance separates the controversialist, who aspires to change existing religious forms, from the learned man who only proposes a speculative end, without any direct reference to the order of contemporaneous facts. Strangers to the causes which produce these abrupt varieties of opinion, which belong rightfully to the circle of men of the world, but which ought not to extend beyond the learned, they are not obliged to perform acts of faith according to the caprices of fashion, nor condemn themselves to silence because they have not brought their studies to bear upon ideas which such parties think most suitable to their views at the time. The government of affairs here below belongs, in fact, to other forces than science and reason; the thinker believes himself to have but a small right to the direction of affairs in his planet, and, satisfied with the share allotted to him, he accepts his impotence without regret. A spectator in the universe, he knows that the world only belongs to him as a subject of study, and that the part of reformer requires almost always in those who undertake it, defects and qualities which he does not possess.

Let us keep, then, each of the elements in their place, though often contradictory, yet without which the development of humanity remains incomplete. Let us leave the religions to proclaim themselves unassailable, since without that they will not obtain from their adherents the respect of which they are in need; but do not let us compel science to pass under the censure of a power which has nothing scientific about it. Do not let us confound



legend with history; but let us not endeavour to get rid of legend, since that is the form in which the faith of humanity is necessarily clothed. Humanity is not composed of the learned and the philologist. She deceives herself frequently, or, we should rather say, she deceives herself of necessity, upon questions of facts and persons: she often renders homage and bestows sympathy in the wrong place; more often still she exaggerates the position of individuals, and heaps on the heads of her favourites, merits which belong to the entire generation; but to see the truth of all this, one ought to have a delicacy of mind and a knowledge which is utterly wanting in her. But she does not deceive herself on the particular object of her worship: that which she adores is really adorable; for what she adores in characters, what she has idealised, are the goodness and beauty she has put there. It may be affirmed that if a new religious phenomenon were to appear, the myth would find its place in the timid disposition which characterises our age of reflection. Whatever care may be taken at first to repress everything which emanates from the purest rationalism, the second generation would doubtless be less puritanical than the first, and the third less still. Thus we should introduce successive complications where the great imaginative instincts of humanity would give themselves full scope, and then the critic would again find, at the end of several ages, that he would have to undertake his work of analysis and research.

Persons more influenced towards sentiment than towards science, and more richly endowed for action than for thought, understand with difficulty (I know it) the opportunity of like researches, and receive them generally with displeasure. This is a respectable sentiment, which we ought to be slow to blame. To those who entertain it I would venture to advise not to read works composed from the point of view of the modern critic; these writings can

only provoke, as far as they are concerned, disagreeable feelings, and even the trouble that they feel in reading them proves that such reading is not good for them. The good spirit (or rather that which we so term), which keeps from the little minds the points necessarily for good, is essential to the government of this world; a ship without ballast, carrying showy sails, is as ill fitted for the voyage as a hulk without sails and heavily laden. The incapacity of Germany in the field of action, is it not the consequence of the incomparable gifts with which nature has endowed her for intellectual speculation? The practical man cannot have the breadth of mind of the man devoted to thought: on his side, the thinker, if he wishes to take part in worldly affairs, is bound by a crowd of compromise which weakens and destroys his originality. Here, as in all things, good government of the human mind involves liberty. I wish people would leave these peaceable and inoffensive researches to be pursued in the obscurity which suits them. Science would be very rash if it should aspire to change opinion; her proceedings interest only the few. Repulsive and without attraction, with what means could she resist so much power as retains the world, doubtless by the better right? We only ask for liberty; with liberty souls will divide themselves, and each one chose spontaneously the view, which for it, is the truth.

I do not overlook the misunderstanding to which I am liable every time I touch upon matters which are the objects of belief to a certain number of men; but the delicate exercise of thought would be interfered with if I were obliged to consider the contrary meaning which pre-occupied minds could conceive in reading what they do not understand. Persons, but little familiar with intellectual matters, often imagine that they give themselves an air of profound wisdom in falsifying and exaggerating opinions at the expense of those who wish to have the



merit of moderation. For these persons writers should be classed in distinct categories; by their favour one is pantheistic or atheistic without knowing it; they create schools by their own private authority, and one often learns from them with surprise, that one has been brought up by masters whom one did not know. Men of the world willingly believe themselves possessed of the attribute of good sense in summing up with some absurd terms, and who contradict of themselves the great theses of science and genius. Strauss has thus become a lunatic, who has denied the existence of Jesus; Wolf is a fool, who has denied Homer; Hegel a mad fellow, who has said that yes is equal to no; and if I might be permitted to say here, that so far from denying the existence of Jesus, Strauss admits it, and admits it in every page of his book; that Wolf only denies the artificial composition of the Iliad and the Odyssey; that Hegel has not wished in his boldest formula anything more than to mark the relative and partial character of all our affirmations, I shall pass for a disciple of Strauss, whom I have strenuously opposed; of Wolf, whom I have never considered; of Hegel, whose loftiness of mind I admire, but with whom I have few points in common. The inconvenience of this kind of thing is unavoidable. The discernment of fine points will always be the lot of the few; but this few, when they undertake works of the spirit, are the only persons whose suffrage one ought to seek.

Among the objections which I foresee, is one to which I ought to make some answer beforehand. I should regret if, in enunciating certain ideas contrary to the opinions generally received in France, it should be considered that I ought to have made a greater display of demonstration. But this defect is inseparable from the very nature of the fragments which compose the present volume. The question here is not as to memoranda specially collected, in

which erudition and philology have full scope, but as to articles written for reviews and newspapers without any more scientific preparation than was necessary for their insertion, whether such ought to find a place. If we consult the works of which I have taken account, or those which I have cited on contested points, we shall find proofs which I could not set out at large, and which I should have had but little time to add elsewhere. Critical works destined for reviews would become impossible if in rendering an account of a book we were compelled to set up again the scaffolding which had been made use of by the author in constructing the edifice. In another series of works of a more technical character, my "General History of the Semitic Languages" in particular, I have endeavoured to treat under the more special form, some of the questions which I could not have dealt with here in a general way. I hope that what may now appear gratuitous in the views I present to the public will appear some day in their full light and conformably to the plan of study I have laid down. After I have finished the history of the Semitic languages I may be permitted to contribute something towards clearing up the history of the Semitic religions and the origins of Christianity. I shall not then spare any of the details which the nature of the collected works forbids me now to give.

I had at first resolved to answer here the recent criticisms which, by distortions of fact, mixed with strange reasoning, rather than by their own value, seemed to require rectification. But the attack regulates the defence, and it would have been difficult for me to answer sophism and subtlety without being myself somewhat fastidious and subtle. The silence which I have kept until now, which has enabled my adversaries to triumph as for a victory, I desire still to keep. However, I am ready to receive with

gratitude; to discuss, and adopt, if need be, any observations truly scientific which may be addressed to me. Moreover, I shall be firm in resisting the declamations of the sectarian spirit, and avoiding at any price those pitiable debates which too often make learning ridiculous in substituting personal questions for pure researches after truth. If it be thought that by injuries, by falsified citations, anonymous denials which none dare avow, equivocations skilfully calculated to delude people unacquainted with science, I shall be hindered in the object of research and reflection on which I am engaged, they deceive themselves. These researches have always had for me a supreme interest; they will remain, under a form more and more enlarged, the principal object of my curiosity. If I was, like many others, the slave of my desire, if self-interest or vanity guided me in the conduct of my works, they would by such means doubtless succeed in making me abandon my studies, which are generally recompensed by injury. But desiring nothing, if this is not to do good, not demanding for study other reward than itself, I venture to affirm that no human motive has the power to make me say one word more or less than I have resolved to say. The liberty of which I have need, being that of science, it ought not to be wanting; if the seventeenth century had its Holland, it is difficult that, in the diminution of souls of our day, we cannot find a corner of the world where we can think at our ease. Nothing, consequently, will make me deviate from the plan I have laid down, and which seems to me to be the line of duty: inflexible research after truth, according to the measure of my strength, by all the means of legitimate investigation which are at the disposal of the human mind; firm and frank expression of the results which seem to me probable or certain, without any after-thought of application and



all expedient formulas; open to the correction which the criticism of competent persons or the progress of science may bring to bear upon me. The attacks of ignorance as well as fanaticism afflict me, without moving me when I think they are sincere. In the case where I cannot consider them as such, I hope to arrive by familiarity to the time when they will not even trouble me.





# STUDIES OF RELIGIOUS HISTORY.

## *THE RELIGIONS OF ANTIQUITY.*

CRITICISM is the birth of to-day, and it belongs only to the most delicate criticism to perceive the true importance of the study of religion outside all dogmatism as well as all polemics. If mankind acquire anything, it is when, being raised above the vulgarity of life, they reach by their moral and intellectual faculties a world of higher intuitions and disinterested enjoyment. Religion is the ideal portion of human life; it is all comprised in this word: "Man does not live on bread alone." There is, I know, another power which assumes to regulate the spiritual life of humanity, but this moment would be improper to depreciate it. This, however, is not to deny Philosophy, but to give it its proper place, the only one where it can be great, strong, and unassailable, to assert that it is not suitable for the majority. Sublime if we regard it in the presence-chamber of the wise, to whom it is at once both food and entertainment, Philosophy is but an imperceptible fact in the face of the history of humanity. We may count the souls it has ennobled; we can put into four pages the history of the little aristocracy who are grouped under its badge: the remainder, given up to the torrent of their dreams, their terrors, and their enchant-

ments, are carried pell-mell into the dangerous valleys of instincts and madness, seeking their reasons for acting, and believing only in the dazzlings of the brain and the palpitations of the heart.

The religion of a people, being the most complete expression of their individuality, is in one sense more instructive than their history. The history of a people does not belong entirely to themselves; it includes a part, fortuitous or fatal, that does not depend on the nation, which sometimes tends to the contrary in its natural development; but the religious legend is the actual and exclusive work of each race. India, for example, has not left us a single line of history properly so called: the learned sometimes regret this, and would pay a weight of gold for some chronicle, some series of kings; but, in truth, we have better than all that; we have her poems, her mythology, her sacred books—we have her soul. In history we should have had some dry facts related, the true character of which the critic would have had much difficulty in ascertaining: fable gives us, like the imprint of a seal, a faithful image of her style of feeling and thought; it is her moral portrait traced by herself. That which the eighteenth century regarded as a mass of superstition and puerility has thus become, in the eyes of the philosopher of history, the most curious of documents upon the bygone time of humanity. Studies which formerly seemed to belong to frivolous minds are now elevated to the plane of the highest speculations, and a book devoted to the interpretation of fables, which Bayle could not find worthy enough to amuse children, has taken a place among the most serious works of our age.

In order to appreciate the importance of this book, we must mention the vast mythological encyclopædia which one of the ablest representatives of French erudition has grouped around a translation, lately finished, of the *Sym-*



*bolique* of Dr. Fr. Creuzer.<sup>1</sup> The time ought to be stated when this meritorious work was undertaken, to naturalise amongst us a whole series of studies, so flourishing among our neighbours and so neglected among ourselves. The first volume of the *Religions of Antiquity* appeared in 1825; it connected itself with the movement of curiosity which then agitated the minds of thinkers, and caused them to seek in more comprehensive history the solution of the problems in which the enlightened party were warmly interested. It is rarely that such works are finished in the midst of the movement they have originated, but the last volumes of the *Religions of Antiquity* were met by the public with as much ardour and hope as the first had received. They have proved, too, that nothing has changed in the zeal of the scholar, who during a quarter of a century had been interpreting one of the most important branches of German erudition, and to whom no one will deny the title of reformer of mythological studies in France.

The translator of the *Symbolique* found these studies degraded among us to the last degree of mediocrity; it was the time when M. Petit-Radel gravely made a dissertation upon the adventures of the cow Io, and set out in a memorandum the synoptical table of the lovers of Helen, with their ages in connection with that of the princess. Germany, on the contrary, initiated in the knowledge of antiquity by the grand generation of Wolf and Heyne, otherwise drawn nearer by inclination for the religious intuitions of the earlier ages, was rich already in excellent writings upon ancient mythology and upon the manner of interpreting it. What was more important than all was to bring up the arrears of more

<sup>1</sup> *Religions of Antiquity, considered principally in their Symbolical and Mythological Forms.* By Dr. Fr. Creuzer. Translated and edited by J. D. Guigniant. 10 vols. in 8vo. Paris, 1825-51.

than half a century and render accessible the treasures of wholesome learning which Germany had acquired, while France continued the traditions of the superficial criticisms of the eighteenth century. The *Symbolique* of M. Creuzer, by its imposing size, its European reputation, the elevation of its views, the high philosophy and science which the author had displayed, offered everything at once.

M. Guigniaut has understood that the translation of a single work, already surpassed in several points of detail by more recent works, would imperfectly attain the end which he proposed. He has resolved, then, to collect around the book of M. Creuzer the results of works of parallel or later date, so as to make, with the *Symbolique* as a text-book, a synthetical system embracing all the mythological studies of Germany. The opinion of learned Europe has been long since pronounced upon the value of this plan and upon the manner in which it has been carried out. France has recognised it as the model to follow in the introduction of the difficult work among the productions of German science. Germany, on her side, has accorded to the French edition the highest approbation, for she seems to have adopted on all important points the modifications introduced by the translator. The book of M. Guigniaut, courageously brought out under adverse circumstances—divergent and sometimes so contrary—has become an indispensable manual, not only to the antiquarian and the philologist, but still more so to all those inquiring spirits who believe that the history of religions is one of the most essential elements of the history of the human mind—that is to say, of true Philosophy.

## I.

Religion has such a deep hold of the inner fibres of the human conscience that scientific interpretation becomes at intervals almost impossible. The efforts of the most subtle criticism could not retrieve the false position in which we find ourselves in face of these primitive works.

Full of life, sense, and truth for the people who have been animated by their breath, they are nothing more in our eyes than dead letters, sealed hieroglyphics; created by the simultaneous effort of all the faculties acting in the most perfect harmony, they are nothing more to us than an object for curious analysis. In order to frame the history of a religion, we ought to believe no longer, but we ought to have believed; we ought to understand thoroughly the worship which has provoked in us the first sudden motion towards the ideal. Who can be just towards Catholicism who has not been lulled to sleep with that admirable legend, if in the accents of its hymns, in the arched roofs of its temples, in the symbols of its worship he does not recall the first sensations of religious life? The most essential condition for thoroughly appreciating the religions of antiquity will always be wanting to us; for we ought to have lived in the midst of the religions, or at least reproduce in ourselves their sentiment with a profundity of which the most exceptional historical genius is hardly capable. Whatever efforts we may make, we shall never sufficiently cast off all our modern ideas, so as not to find the fables which are usually presented to us as the creeds of Greece and Rome absurd and unworthy of the attention of a serious man. To those persons who are but little acquainted with historical science, it is a constant subject of astonishment to see people who have been put forward as masters of the human mind worship



drunken and adulterous deities, and admit among their religious dogmas extravagant tales of scandalous adventures. The most simple believe themselves right to shrug their shoulders at such an extraordinary illusion. It is necessary, however, to start from this principle: the human mind is never wilfully absurd, and every time the spontaneous acts of conscience appear to us to be devoid of reason, it is because we do not really understand. When a people has shown sufficient sense to produce works like those which Greece has left us, to put into practice a political plan such as that which gave to Rome universal domination, would it not be very strange if they should remain on the level of people given up to the grossest fetichism? Is it not very probable that, if we were to place ourselves really at the same point of view as the ancients, this pretended extravagance would disappear, and we should discover that these fables, like all the productions of human nature, had some degree of reason in them? Good sense is homogeneous, and it would be inexplicable if those nations who in civil and political life, in art, poetry, and philosophy, have shown the measure of what they could do, should not in religion have passed beyond a worship of which the absurdity is in our own days revolting to the reason of a child.

This misunderstanding, nevertheless, is of very old date, and it is not in modern times only that Paganism has begun to be an object of perpetual misconstruction. It is evident that antiquity itself had ceased to understand religion, and that the old myths, hatched in the primitive imagination, very early lost all significance. The idea of making these old fables into a connected chronology, a sort of amusing history, was conceived prior to Boccaccio or Demoustier. Ovid had realised it in a book less improper than the *Letters to Emily*. I do not wish to overlook the charming part in this endless garland of witty tales and

lively changes; but what sacrilege, in a religious point of view, to play thus with symbols consecrated by time, and on which men had placed their first hopes of a divine world! The design of Mascarille to turn into verse the whole of Roman history was more reasonable than the undertaking to make a travesty of theological antiquities by turning them into equivocal stories, which are as like the primitive myths as old paper flowers, yellow and smoke-dried, are like to the flowers of the field.

But such was the mode of treating the religions of antiquity adopted by almost all the writers on mythology up to the present day. *Mythology* (that was the word by which they designated these compilations of grotesque narratives, which were almost always indecent) became a series of biographies, where, under the guise of sacred rubrics, one learned the scarcely edifying life of Mercury, the loose conduct of Venus, the domestic scenes between Jupiter and Juno. Far from regretting the discredit which our age has cast on the common use of these fables, the astonishment is that so many fine minds of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries should not have felt their insipidity.

When science began to be seriously occupied with the interpretation of ancient symbols, its efforts, in France at least, were not very fortunate. France is not the country for mythological studies. The French mind is wanting in that kind of flexibility, in the faculty for reproducing in itself the intuitions of former ages which are so essential to the proper understanding of religions. The learned of former days—Jean Leclerc, Banier, Larcher, Clavier, Petit-Radel—did not raise themselves above a brutal *evhemerism*,<sup>1</sup> or a system of allegorical explanations not less superficial.

<sup>1</sup> We know that Evhemerism regarded the gods as men who had been deified.

Happy when, in resisting the prejudices by which Bochart, Huet, Bossuet, and the whole theological school were led away, they did not seek in Greek mythology a form altered from the traditions of the Bible! The critics who were inspired with the philosophy of the eighteenth century—Boulanger, Bailly, Dupuis—did indeed depart from this method, but only to try a symbolism still less satisfactory. Sainte-Croix brought to bear upon the study of these mysteries a more solid learning, but power of penetration no better than his predecessors. At last Emeric David produced in his *Jupiter* the ornament of French symbolism. His system is very simple. It is exclusively allegory. "Mythology is a collection of enigmas intended to teach the nature of the gods and the dogmas of religion to those who can penetrate the secret." The word *to guess* is the religious dogma. Thus when for the name of Apollo we have substituted the word sun, and when in the place of Amphitrite we have said the sea, all is said, for the word *to guess* is a single word. Afterwards, in endeavouring to free the religious dogmas hidden under these enigmas, Emeric David found seven which constitute Greek theology. Mythology is only a kind of catechism *en rebus*, made up of wit which consists in allusions. The fables have been only invented to cover dogmas; each one has a sense very pure and fixed. How did this enigmatical form contribute to render dogma more intelligible? How could the human mind, already in possession of a clear idea, have conceived the fancy of explaining it by an idea more obscure? How could a race allow itself to be overcome by this love of riddles? It is this we require to know from Emeric David. Has not Locke taught us that the human mind proceeds from the simple to the complex; that in order for two ideas to be associated it is necessary that at first they should be separate one from the other? To pretend that in the



human mind the notion of the thing signified does not preclude that of the sign, that before the created symbol man knew precisely what he puts in it, would have been verily to speak in an unintelligible language at a time when we were convinced that the human mind had always proceeded according to the rules drawn by Abbé de Condillac.

Whilst France sought to interpret the religions of antiquity according to her superficial philosophy, Germany solved the difficulty rather by the analogy of her religious genius than by the solidity of her learning. Goethe placed the centre of his poetic life in Olympus. Lessing and Winckelmann, the Hebraist Herder himself, discovered the religion of beauty in the ancient worships. Gœrres sought there the depths of his mysticism. Schelling, in his writings on transcendental philosophy, discoursed seriously on the gods of Samothrace, though not happily. A crowd of philologists and antiquarians have sought, in the written and sculptured monuments of antiquity, to decipher the meaning of the great enigma bequeathed to science by the primitive world. The *Symbolique* of Dr. Frederic Creuzer, like a summary of this multiplicity of facts and systems from 1810 to 1812, forms a work in which we should find concentrated all the first movement of mythological study. This is a grand lesson, and like a revelation, to show for the first time reunited in a scientific pantheon all the gods of humanity—Indian, Egyptian, Persian, Phœnician, Etruscan, Greek, Roman. The continuous elevation, the religious and profound tone, the feeling of the superior destiny of humanity, which breathes through the whole book, shows that a great revolution has been accomplished, and that an irreligious age, because it was exclusively analytical, is about to be succeeded by a better school, reconciled by synthesis with the whole of human nature. The Neo-platonic spirit of

Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus seems to revive in this grand and philosophic method of explaining ancient symbols, and the shade of Julian ought to thrill on hearing a doctor in Christian theology take up his thesis and proclaim that Paganism could suffice for the deepest needs of the soul, and procure peace for those noble minds who, at the last hour, sought to take to their bosom the gods already about to depart.<sup>1</sup>

There are, above all, in historical science qualities which, to speak truly, are in a measure defects, and what proves the truth and the force of a system shows also its error and weakness. This mystic enthusiasm, the first start off of the philosophy of nature then being born in Germany, this sympathetic manner, which showed a real progress in mythological studies, ought, if compared with the cold and unintelligent dissertations of the French school, to have its excesses, and in some sort its intoxication. M. Creuzer has all the defects of his Alexandrian masters—the symbolic exaggeration, a too decided tendency to seek mysteries everywhere, and sometimes the most immoderate syncretism. Jamblichus by the side of Hesiod, Nonnus by the side of Homer, figure on the same page in the interpretation of the same myth. The Alexandrians are, in his eyes, good interpreters, true restorers of Paganism, who are oftentimes recalled by philosophic intuition to the primitive sense of the dogmas. The orphic philosophers themselves, although suspected of charlatanism, had preserved the spirit of primitive religion. It seems that there was no time for M. Creuzer. He seeks too high for his solutions, because he himself lives too high, because he has not the sentiment of life, innocent, simple, infantine, all-sensual and yet all-divine as it was, with the first Indo-Hellenic races. It required a soul intoxicated with poetry to comprehend the entrancing

<sup>1</sup> See *Religions de l'Antiquité*, tome i. p. 3, and tome iii. p. 830.

delight which men of those races felt at first in the face of Nature and themselves. Accustomed to seek something reasonable in everything, we insist on finding profound combinations where there was nothing but instinct and fancy. Serious and positive, we exhaust our philosophy in following the traces of the dreams of a child.

Greek mythology, or, in a more general sense, the mythology of the Indo-European race, seen in its first flight, is only the reflex of young and delicate organs, without anything dogmatic, anything theological, or anything resolved on: as well explain the sounds of bells or seek out the figures of the clouds as to seek for a precise sense in the dreams of the golden age. Primitive man saw Nature with the eyes of a child; now the child frames everything on the wonders he finds in himself. The pleasurable intoxicating effect of life makes him giddy—makes him see the world through a softly-coloured mist: looking on everything with an inquisitive and joyous regard, he smiles on everything, and everything smiles on him. Disabused by experience, we no longer expect any extraordinary benefit from the infinite combination of things; but the child does not know what results from that which goes on before him; he believes more in the possible because he hardly knows the actual. Hence his joys and his terrors; he makes for himself a fantastic world, which enchants and frightens him alternately. He affirms his dreams; he has no appreciation of the power of analysis, which, when we arrive at the age of reflection, makes us cold observers in the face of reality. Such was primitive man. Scarcely separated from Nature, he conversed with her, he spoke to her and heard her voice; that great mother, to whom he held still through his arteries, appeared to him living and lively. At the sight of the phenomena of the physical world he experienced different impressions, which, being embodied in his imagination, became his



gods. He worshipped his sensations, or rather, to put it better, the vague and unknown object of his sensations; for not separating as yet the object from the subject, the world was himself, and he himself was the world.

In the face of the sea, for instance, which displayed to his mind voluptuous lines, colours dazzling and sombre by turns, sentiments of the indefinite, of sadness, of infinity, of terror, and of beauty, which arose in his soul, revealed to him a cycle of melancholy gods, capricious, multiform, intangible. Others were the impressions and gods of the mountains; others of the earth; others of the fires and volcanoes; others of the atmosphere and various phenomena. The whole of Nature thus reflected in the primitive conscience became divinities yet unnamed.

"It seems," says M. Creuzer, "that we have to do, not with men like ourselves, but with elementary minds endowed with a wonderful view of Nature and of things, with a power to feel everything and to comprehend everything in a sort of magnetic way." Thence those mysterious races the Telchines of Rhodes, the Curetes of Crete, the Dactyls of Phrygia, the Minyæ and the Sintics of Lemnos, the Cabeiri of Samothrace, races ecstatic and magic like the Trolls of Scandinavia, in direct communication with the forces of Nature. Everything which struck the attention of man, everything which excited in his mind an impression of the divine, was a god or the element of a god—a great river, a great mountain, a star remarkable for its brilliancy or the peculiarity of its course, thousands of objects of which the symbolic sense is no longer perceptible to us. Examine the places which were considered sacred by antiquity, and it will be almost impossible for you to discover the motive which led men to suppose that the divinity was there rather than anywhere else. We should say little about them but for the memories which attach to them. The Capitol, regarded as a mere hill, has little

character. The Lake Avernus, which struck the imagination of the ancients so vividly, offers to us nothing more than a pretty little landscape.

It would be something like the endeavour to trace the flight of a bird through the air to try to take hold of the fine traces of these first religious intuitions, and to describe the capricious ways of the imagination in these delicate creations to which man and Nature each contributed in the closest relationship. A historical fact, a moral thought, an appearance of phenomena atmospheric, geologic, astronomic, a lively sensation, a fear, were all expressed by a myth. Language itself, as M. Creuzer says, was a fruitful mother of gods and heroes. The trait which seems characteristic of wit in its most exhausted form, the play of words, the pun, was the most familiar source of primitive mythology. Many important myths of antiquity rest only on fictitious etymology, on alliterations like those which please the fancy of a child: thus the ivory shoulder of Pelops, Drépane and the scythe of Ceres, Tarsus and the winged sandals of Perseus. Others rest on mistakes, veritable blunders, engendered by fanciful tales. It is thus with the Nile vase, the *Canopus* surmounted by a human head, the image of which doubtless struck the first Greeks who made a voyage to Egypt, and became by a long series of cock-and-bull stories a Greek hero who assisted at the siege of Troy. The hero Cantharus issues in the same way from a cantharus or drinking-glass, and was at the same time the drinking-cup and the companion of Bacchus. Oftentimes, however, inappreciable connection of ideas, rhythmic reasons, like those which determine the forms of an arabesque, govern the formation of these strange fables. Why should Neptune and the horse, Venus and the sea, be always associated? Perhaps we ought not to seek for a similar comparison another reason than the infinite grace of the watery

element, the undulation of outlines, and the harmonious manner in which the curves are allied to the flexible lines of the finest type of animal nature.

We see it is impossible to establish a classification among the gods drawn from the four winds of heaven. Indetermination of sense under the most entire determination of form is the essential characteristic of art; so it is with Greek mythology. Mythology is a second language, born, like the first, from the echo of Nature in the conscience, as inexplicable as the first by analysis, but the mystery reveals itself to those who comprehend the hidden strength of spontaneity, the secret accord between Nature and the soul, the perpetual hieroglyphic upon which the expression of human sentiment is based. Every god appears to us as a completed cycle, a region of ideas, a tone of the harmony of things. It is not enough to say, with the old school of allegory: Minerva is wisdom, Venus is beauty. Minerva and Venus are feminine nature regarded from the two sides; the one side spiritual and holy, the other side esthetical and voluptuous. If Mercury was only the god of thieves and Bacchus the god of wine, as we teach children, we should have fictions moderately ingenious, figures of rhetoric poor enough to serve for an epic of Boileau; but antiquity never worshipped gods so grossly puerile. Mercury is human nature regarded in its natural disposition and its industry—the youth such as he appears in the gymnasium, beautiful in strength and agility. On the contrary, all the ideas of youthfulness, pleasure, voluptuousness, adventurous expeditions, easy triumphs, terrible passions, group themselves round Bacchus. This is the bright side of life; this is the child petted by the nymphs, always young, handsome, fortunate, surrounded with caresses and kisses: his soft languor, his impure forms, his rotundity, the feminine type degenerating towards androgynism, disclose a less noble origin.



Compared with the god, Greek *par excellence*—with Apollo—he is still a stranger, who, in spite of his long stay in Greece, has not lost his Asiatic air; he is clothed with a *bassara*, for he has a fear of going naked; his brows are encircled with an Oriental mitre, for his hair does not suffice to cover his head.

One of these myths, which seems to me the best to make one comprehend this extreme complexity, these fleeting aspects, these numberless contradictions of ancient fables, is that of Glaucus,<sup>1</sup>—a humble myth, however, a myth of poor folks, but having at the same time better preserved its primitive and popular character. Those who have passed their childhood at the seaside know how many associations of profound and poetical ideas are formed by the lively sights which the shore affords. Glaucus is the personification and the *résumé* of those beliefs and impressions—a god created by sailors, who see in it all the poetry of life as it appears to these poor people. Old age bears him down; he becomes a prey to despair, and throws himself into the sea, and is changed into a prophet—the prophet of misfortune, the sad old man. We meet him everywhere, his body attenuated by the action of the water, covered with shell-fish and sea-weed. According to others, he threw himself into the waves in order to prove his immortality. Since then, he returns each year to visit the shores and the islands. In the evening, when the wind announces itself or begins, Glaucus (that is to say, the greyish-blue waves) rises and pronounces noisy oracles. The fishermen crouch at the bottom of their boats, and endeavour by fastings, prayers, and incense to turn away the evils which await

<sup>1</sup> I take the more willingly this myth for an example, because it has been very fully discussed by one of the fellow-workers of M. Guignaut, M. Ernest Vinet, in *Les Annales de l'Institut Archæologique de Rome*, t. xv.

them. Glaucus, however, mounted on a rock, threatens in Eolic language their fields and their flocks, and utters lamentations on his own immortality. They recount his loves—sad unfortunate loves, finishing like an evil dream. He loved a beautiful mermaid named Scylla. One day, hoping to touch her, he brought some shells and young unfledged swallows to amuse her. She saw his tears and had pity on him; but Circe, from jealousy, poisoned the bath of the young girl, and she became a barking monster, personifying the natural horror which is inspired by the squalls and dangers of the Sicilian sea. The poor Glaucus from this moment remained always awkward, dull, grumbling and malevolent. We see him upon monuments with his beard of sea-weed, his fixed look and contracted brows. The Loves make fun at his expense; one pulls his hair, another gives him a blow. Sometimes he is *Glauce*, that is to say, the colour bordering upon green and blue which appears on the sea when it is shallow upon white sand; the colour of the sea thus becomes a woman, like the mounting summit of the waves becomes the white heads of the *Grees* (old women), who make the sailors afraid. Sometimes it is Lamia who draws men and entices them with her attractions; at other times a hawk which plunges in turning upon its prey; then an insatiable siren holding a young man in each hand. Cast pell-mell all the ideas of the men of the sea, mix up the scattered branches of the dreams of a sailor, and you have the myth of Glaucus—melancholy pre-occupation, painful and deformed dreams, vivid sensibility to all the phenomena produced by the waves, perpetual inquietude, danger everywhere, enticement everywhere, the future uncertain, great impression of fatality. Glaucus is at once the colour and the noise of the sea, the wave which whitens, the reflection of the sun on the waters, the evening wind which forebodes the storm on the morrow, the movement of the diver, the



stunted form of the man of the sea, the impotent desires, the sad returns of the solitary life, the doubt, the dispute, the despair, the long dulness of a certainty exhausting itself against a sophism, and the sad immortality which can neither assure nor deliver itself; painful enigma, echo of the melancholy sentiment which speaks to man of his unknown origin and of his divine destiny, a truth which, to his misfortune, it is impossible for him to prove, for it is superior to his understanding, and man cannot demonstrate it or escape from it.

We feel how these delicate, scarcely tangible perceptions, these remains of fleeting impressions, must appear unintelligible to a more advanced age. Oftentimes the ancients found themselves embarrassed with their mythology in much the same degree as we find ourselves now. We desire to find reality in these vague images, so as to give a body to their dreams. But such was the indefinite character of the ancient fables that each one could find in them whatever he wanted. Some would adopt broadly the impious system of Evhemerus, who explained every marvellous tradition by historical facts. Others, deeply impressed with a more elevated philosophy, sought in the myths a symbolic interpretation of that philosophy. The gods of simple antiquity had part in the wants and pleasures of men; they ate and they drank. That signifies, says Proclus, that they create incessantly by the mixture of the finite and the infinite; ambrosia, the solid food, represents the finite; nectar, the liquid, typifies the infinite. Uranus, Saturn, and Jupiter are, according to Plotinus, the three principles of the intelligible world, *the one, the intelligence, and the soul*. Jupiter begets Venus; she is the universal soul producing itself outside. Saturn devouring his children; he is intelligence, the law of which is to re-enter incessantly into itself. Everything was thus allegory and metaphor. The flowers which the



sun causes to blow in the early days, the delightful childishness of the new-born conscience, becomes in the hands of the philosophy of pedantry cold and inelegant enigmas. If there be a myth in which is preserved, in the most transparent manner, beyond the exterior of anthropomorphism, the trace of the primitive worship of Nature, it is without question that of the nymphs. It is scarcely needful to change their names and their attributes in order to find the fountains and the running streams in these deities, fresh, young, delicate, tripping, laughing, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, who dart from the midst of the rocks, in singing and turning like children, whose voice is sweet and mysterious, who never sleep, who spin wool coloured with the green of the sea, or weave purple stuffs among the rocks—compassionate goddesses who cure complaints, and who sometimes carried off by force and killed. See, however, from whence Porphyry has drawn in his *Antre des Nymphes* an entire philosophy. The nymphs are the souls; their veils are the bodies; the cave is the world. The interior of the cave typifies the sensible side, being dark; the exterior, the intelligent side, light, &c.

The essential defect of the system of M. Creuzer consists in his having considered Paganism too much under this mystic and philosophic form. It is as if with the works of the Neo-catholic school we should pretend to reconstruct the theory of primitive Christianity. Myths have only meaning really in those epochs when man believed himself to live in a divine world without any knowledge of their being subject to the laws of Nature. But long before the end of Paganism this first simplicity had disappeared. The supernatural was only a miracle—that is to say, a derogation caused by the deity from the established order of things, a conception radically different from that of primitive man, for which there was no natural order, but

a continual play of living and free forces. At this antique age there was nothing which could be called dogma, positive religion, or sacred writing. The child does not dispute; he has no need of solution, for he does not put a problem; for him everything is clear. The aureole with which the world is adorned in his eyes, the deified life, the poetic cry of his soul, that is his worship—celestial worship—including an act of adoration without reflection and free from all premeditated subtlety.

It is, then, a very grave error to suppose that it was a remote epoch when humanity created symbols to cover dogmas, and with the distinct view of the dogma and the symbol. All that is born simultaneously, of the same union, in an indivisible moment, like a thought or a word, an idea and its expression. Myths do not enclose two elements, an outside and something inside; they are undivided. This question, Did primitive man understand or not the sense of the myths he created? is got rid of, for in the myth the intention was not distinct from the thing itself. Man understood the myth without seeing anything in it, like a simple thing, and not like two things. The abstract language we are obliged to use for explaining the ancient fables ought not to cause any illusion. Our analytical habit compels us to separate the sign from the thing signified; but to spontaneous man, moral and religious thought presents itself clothed in the myth as its natural form. The primitive age was neither grossly given to fetichism, for everything had a meaning for it, nor refined spiritually, for it had conceived nothing in the abstract or outside the obvious covering: it was an age of confused unity, when man saw one thing within another, and expressed each of the two worlds open before him.

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Patrician Modesty, the Fortune of Women, the Dream, &c. We have had myths invented, or at least developed with reflection, as that of Psyche. This is absolutely incontestable; but a deep line of demarcation existed between these clear, simple, spiritual allegories and the antique enigmas, true works of the Sphinx, where the idea and the symbol are entirely inseparable. M. Creuzer has thoroughly seen that the sense of the ancient symbols was lost in a remote epoch; that Homer was already a very bad theologian; that his gods were only poetical personages on the same level as man, leading a noble and jolly life, divided between pleasure and action, like the chiefs of the Hellenic tribes; that the most respectable myths become in his hands amusing histories, pleasant themes of narratives, tinged with a colour entirely human. Was it right, notwithstanding, to conclude that before the epic age there was a great theological age, during which Greece failed to become a sacerdotal country, with a profound religion, revered symbols, hierarchical institutions, and a depth of monotheism derived from the East? We think not. We say as we wish, that the Hellenic period was a religious decadence, a triumph of the hero and the poet over the priest, of a religion popular, clear, easy, but void of sense—in a word, laic—over the sacerdotal arcana. It does not follow from that that the Pelasgians had had a fixed theology, learned symbols, and an organised priesthood. "We always," says Ottfried Müller, "start with this supposition, that a poet, a sage most ancient, would, with premeditation, have clothed in clear ideas symbols and allegorical myths which later on might have been taken for actual facts and developed under historic forms. But this epoch, representing to itself all the relations of the divinity—of Nature and of man as much of persons, as much of significant acts, what we call contempt or misunderstanding—existed in principle in the heart of the



myth itself, and has not come from the outside. But it would be an exaggeration as contrary to the truth of history as to sound notions of human nature, to pretend that the Hellenic religion was completely devoid of sacerdotal and dogmatic organisation. The oracles, that of Delphos in particular, were like a permanent revelation, respected even by the statesmen who made use of it. What is the *Theogony* of Hesiod if it is not the first rudiment of a national theology, an attempt to organise the city of the gods and their history, like the tribes and cities of Greece were organising themselves into a national body? The name of Orpheus serves, as we cannot doubt, to cover an attempt of the same kind. Later on the mysteries concentrated in themselves all the elements of a more developed religious life. It must be admitted, nevertheless, that the destiny of Greece did not require it to be a priestly country. All the great revolutions of Greece—the successive conquests of the Hellenes, the Heraclidæ, the Dorians—are as much the triumph of the lay spirit as the uprising of the popular energy against an imposed sacerdotal form. The priest within the temple was not of much importance; the poet had nothing more in common with him. In Homer the poet constantly appears exalted at the expense of the sacrificers and the soothsayers. This constitutes the charm of the Homeric world. It is the dream of profane life, the freedom which basks in the sunshine; humanity coming up from below the horizon and shaking off sleep to throw itself into the field of warlike activity, and enjoy itself in the thousand adventures of heroic life. The same revolution operates in art. Priestly art, limited in its types, sacrificing form to sense, the beautiful for the mystical, gives way to a more disinterested art, which for its object excites the sentiment of beauty and not that of holiness. India believed she could best raise up her gods by heaping signs upon signs and symbols upon symbols. Greece,



better inspired, had fashioned them as an image like Helen, who, in honour of Minerva of Lindus, offered a cup of yellow amber made according to the shape of her bosom.

Doubtless symbolism lost something by this transformation. The modest Venus of the earlier age had a character more holy than the deified courtesan who was enthroned on the altars when Praxiteles had made the folds of her robe fall with such an air of propriety as to still reveal the goddess. We may conceive also that, with a feeling very common to epochs of religious decadence, the adherents of Paganism in its latter days were smitten with a retrospective admiration for the stiff forms of hieratic art. In our days the coarser art of the Middle Ages appears also to many persons to be the correct form of religious art. We can hardly deny that, in fact, the Christian mystery, so far as it is a mystery, was better understood by Giotto and Perugino than by Leonardo da Vinci and Titian. M. Creuzer, however, exaggerates a just idea in some respects when he sees a decadence, sacrilege in the contrary sense, in the transformation by which we deprive the gods of their significance as physical superiors in order to make of them purely human personages. It would be easy to show that this, even from the religious point of view, was a real progress. Phidias was not an impious man, as they would wish to make us believe, because he sought his type of Jupiter in his own mind, and not in tradition. Respectable testimony convinces us to the contrary, that this modification of art corresponds to a religious renaissance, and rekindled piety in their souls. We reckon those to be unhappy who died without having seen the image of the Olympian Jupiter, and we believe that something was wanting in their religious initiation, because they had never contemplated the highest realisation of the ideal. Is not the human form the most expressive of symbols? Shall we say that the Canopus, the Vase gods, the

swaddled-up dwarfs of the age of the Cabeiri, are more expressive than the gods formed by the chisels of Praxiteles and Phidias? We must further bear in mind that Greece saw in human forms and pure ideas a thousand analogies which entirely escape us, and that the actual sense of Nature not interfering, all were transfigured in their eyes as living beings. The people who raised Philip of Crotona to the rank of a demigod because he was the most beautiful among the Hellenes of his time are the same who, to express the contrary, made the representation of a faun; who, to express a fountain, a shady place, water and verdure, represented a female head with fishes round her hair; and who did not find a better epithet to give to a river than that of *χαλλιπαρθενοῖς* (to the beautiful virgins): the sight of the whiteness of the waves they likened to young girls.

## II.

The chief mistake M. Creuzer has made is in the title of his book. It is too *symbolical*. Thoroughly pre-occupied with theology and sacerdotal institutions, and overlooking the simple and common side of antiquity, he has sought for abstract and dogmatic ideas in fancy creations which are oftentimes nothing more than the playful follies of childhood. Fully persuaded that Greek religion, like others, ought to have a hieratic age, and not finding this character in the spontaneous works of Greek genius, he harks back upon the colonies and the influences imported from the East. To this double exaggeration two reactions correspond in the movement of mythological study in Germany: to the excess of symbolism is opposed a school entirely negative and anti-symbolic, represented by Voss, G. Hermann, and Lobeck; to the abuse of Oriental influ-



ences is opposed the purely Hellenic school of MM. Ottfried Müller, Welcker, and others.

J. H. Voss was beyond doubt the roughest adversary who at first came across the *Symbolique*. A zealous Protestant and a declared partisan of rationalism, he thought he saw in the work of Dr. Creuzer a dangerous tendency towards the mystical doctrines then beginning to arise in Germany. This book, which timorous consciences in France regard as a piece of intolerable hardihood, was considered in Germany in 1820 as a Catholic manifesto, an apology for priestcraft and theocracy. Some conversions which followed caused considerable sensation; in particular that of Count Frederic de Stolberg served to increase the alarm of Voss at the danger of the alliance which he supposed was about to take place between the symbolic system and Romish proselytism. He thought he saw in M. Creuzer a disguised agent of the Jesuits, and undertook the investigation of his book in seven consecutive numbers of the *Literary Gazette* of Jena (May 1821). The bitter tone of his criticism aroused the indignation of the friends of M. Creuzer. The author of the *Symbolique* replied to the strictures of Voss by a small pamphlet, in which he disdainfully declined to enter upon a discussion with an adversary incapable of comprehending the spirit of his theory, for the proper understanding of which feeling and poetic taste were as necessary as learning and the power of analysis. Voss returned to the charge, and published in 1824 at Stuttgart his *Anti-Symbolique*, a learned pamphlet, full of the most distressing personalities. From all parts there was a cry against polemics so violent. M. Creuzer thought he ought to keep silent.

The *Symbolique* found in M. Lobeck an adversary more circumspect but not less exclusive. His *Aglaophimus* (1829) is the most complete negation of M. Creuzer's

system. Never did critic run more rapidly from one pole to the other; never did opposing qualities and defects establish a more complete dissonance between two men. Led away by the Neo-platonic exegesis, M. Creuzer has supposed that high antiquity was much more mystical than it really is; with a positive analytical mind, convinced that the horror of mysticism is the beginning of wisdom, M. Lobeck seems to take pleasure in finding it insignificant. Wherever M. Creuzer has desired to search out an honest and moral idea among holy and respectable rites, M. Lobeck sees only obscene buffoonery and childishness. The ancient Pelasgic religion, in which M. Creuzer thinks he has discovered an emanation from Oriental symbolism, is nothing in the eyes of M. Lobeck but absurd and gross fetichism. These mysteries, according to M. Creuzer the remains of a pure and primitive worship, are for M. Lobeck only jugglery analogous to those practised in Masonic lodges. Full of holy indignation against what Voss calls allegorical rubbish, the lies of Plato, M. Creuzer, carried away by his vivid imagination, constantly passes beyond the limits of his own knowledge, and rejects boldly all interpretation bearing a religious seal. M. Lobeck is never more happy than when he can deny and show to his adversaries that they have affirmed too much. No mythologist has equalled him as a critic of original texts; but if he refers to the texts, it is not for the purpose of elucidation, but to use one against the other, and to show that the whole rests in darkness. The conclusion drawn in his book is that we know nothing about ancient religions, and that there is not even any ground for conjecture. His attacks do not stop at the religions of antiquity. It is not only in respect of Eleusis and Samothrace that M. Lobeck shows himself to be irreverent and scoffing; every religious form involving hierarchy and mystery, everything which in the slightest



degree resembles Catholicism, creates antipathy in him. Pitiless with regard to popular superstitions, he is even more so to those interpreters who wish to find in them an elevated meaning. Religion and philosophy, according to him, have nothing to do with one another; the Neoplatonists are impudent forgers, who have only succeeded in destroying the physiognomy of ancient religion without making it more acceptable. What is the good of seeking to be only half absurd? What is the good of sweating blood and water to find a meaning where there is none?

If M. Lobeck does possess in an eminent degree the faculties of a critic, we must recognise that he is wanting in the sense for mythological interpretation, the sense of religious things. It will be truly said, on reading it, that Humanity has invented religions, like she has invented charades and conundrums, in order to amuse herself. M. Lobeck thinks that he triumphs in showing that ancient religion was merely a tissue of anachronisms and contradictions, that no one will find two mythologies which agree as to dates, places, or genealogies. But in truth, what does he prove by this? One single thing: that mythology ought not to be treated as a reality; that it is essentially contradictory. But it is precisely on this account that criticism shows an ill grace when she requires from history that which is not historical, and from reason that which does not profess to be reasonable.

Certainly it is good that we should have minds of the stamp of that of M. Lobeck, but it is important to maintain that a method like his will not satisfy either the philosopher or the critic. Nothing is proved by attacking religion with a positive spirit, for religion belongs to another order. Religious sentiment possesses a certainty within itself which reason cannot either strengthen or weaken. It is superfluous to reproach religion with absurdity in the common-sense point of view; it is as if we should argue

upon love and prove the passion to be unreasonable. If the drama of Eleusis were represented before us, it would probably be but a wretched show; but notwithstanding, would you doubt the veracity of the thousands of witnesses who attest to the consoling effect and the moral efficacy of these sacred ceremonies? Did Pindar speak seriously or not when he said of the mysteries of Ceres, "Happy is he who, after having seen this sight, descends into the depths of the earth! he knows the end of life, he knows the divine origin"? Was Andocides joking before the Athenians when, in order to exhort them to seriousness and justice, he said, "You have seen the sacred rites of the goddesses, so that you should punish impiety and save those who defend themselves from injustice"? The sincere Protestant only evinces before Catholic ceremonies a feeling of indifference or repulsion, but these rites are full of charm for those who have been accustomed to them from infancy. This is why every contemptuous and light expression is out of place when exhibited towards the practices of religion. Nothing signifies in itself, and man only finds in the objects of his worship that which he puts there. The altar upon which the patriarchs sacrificed to Jehovah was in reality nothing but a heap of stones, but regarded in its religious signification, like a symbol of God, abstract and without form, of the Semitic race, this heap of stones was of the same value as a temple of Greece. We must not ask for reason with religious sentiment. The spirit blows where it listeth. If it choose to attach the idea to this or to that, what have you to say?

While the sceptical professor of Königsberg employed all the resources of his learning and his criticism to despoil the gods of their glory and depreciate the secret of the mysteries, mythological science strives more and more to seat itself upon the impartial base of history, at an equal distance from the mystic fancies of M. Creuzer and the



anti-religious prejudices of M. Lobeck. Buttman, Völcker, Schwenck, by philosophy and the study of texts; Welcker, Gerhard, Ganofka, by archæology and the study of monuments, endeavoured to seize amongst these different pre-occupations the exact shade of the truth. All, or almost all, agree to recognise, as against M. Creuzer, the originality of Greek mythology. All agree to reject as a blasphemy the proposition that Greece ever was a province of Asia; that the Greek genius, so free, so easy, so limpid, could ever owe anything to the obscure genius of the East. Doubtless the primitive populations of Greece and Italy, like all branches of the Indo-European family, preserved in their religious ideas, as well as in their language, the common features of the race to which they belonged, and this primitive kinship may be recognised still in striking similitudes.<sup>1</sup> But that is not the question; for these identical principles, that all the people of the great race carried with them like their travelling gear, are to be found equally among the Germans, the Celts, and the Slavs, whom no one dreams of placing under the guardianship of the East. What is important to maintain is the independence of the development of the Hellenic mind in its essential parts; excepting the first spark and some borrowing of secondary importance, Greece owes nothing except to her gods, her skies, and her mountains; that this privileged corner of

<sup>1</sup> Some leading discoveries, founded chiefly upon the study of the Vedas, have thrown upon this point a new and unexpected light. We allude to the works of Kuhn, Aufrecht, A. Weber, Roth, works hardly known as yet in France, and to which should be added the ingenious sketch of Baron D'Eckstein. These delicate researches have produced in the study of mythology a revolution analogous to the discovery of the comparative method used in the study of languages. I mean the creation of comparative mythology, where religions are classed by races and families, and where the transformation of primitive myths are described by processes truly organic, and in which the arbitrary has not any part. See, however, as a catalogue of these still fragmentary works, the *Journal of Comparative Philology*, by MM. Kuhn and Aufrecht.

the world, this divine mulberry-leaf cast in the midst of the sea, saw the chrysalis of the human conscience hatched for the first time in its native beauty. Behold why Greece is veritably a holy land for him whose worship is civilisation. Behold the secret of the unconquerable charm she has always exercised over men initiated in liberal ideas. The true origins of the human mind are there: the aristocracy of intellect find there the country of their fathers.

At the head of this exclusively Hellenic<sup>1</sup> school stands the rare man whom the sun of Delphos carried off too soon for science, and who, in a life of forty years, indicated or solved with a marvellous sagacity the most delicate problems in the history of the Hellenic races. I allude to Ottfried Müller.

Whilst admitting, like M. Creuzer, a mysterious worship among the most ancient populations of Greece, M. Müller separates himself distinctly from the chief of the symbolic school by rejecting the worn-out hypothesis of the Oriental colonies, and by denying the sacerdotal and theological complexion of these primitive modes of worship. The religion of the Pelasgi was the worship of Nature, especially comprised in the senses and imagination. The Earth-Mother (Da Mater) and earth-evolved divinities, such as Persephone, Hades, Hermes, and Hecate, of whom the worship is included in the Mysteries, were the gods of the Thracian and Pelasgian tribes, on which the Hellenes imprinted their mythological beliefs in order to transform them according to their method of conceiving the more moral and less cosmical. These modes of worship were

<sup>1</sup> We could say now *too exclusively Hellenic*, for Ottfried Müller, in rightly rejecting Oriental influences in the vague sense that M. Creuzer has given to that word, overlooked also the incontestable ties by which the religious traditions of the Greeks are attached to those of the Asiatics belonging to the Indo-European stock. It is true that the facts which have brought these relations in evidence were scarcely known in the time of Ottfried Müller.



neither a primitive religion nor an institution brought from abroad, but the genuine expression of the genesis, manners, and political life of each of the peoples of Greece. The distinction of races has also become, in the hands of Ottfried Müller, the groundwork of mythological interpretation. From thence those excellent monographs of the Dorians, the Minyæ, and the Etruscans, those investigations so delicate into the nationality of each god and his successive conquests. The contest of Hermes and Apollo is the contest of the old rustic deities of Arcadia with gods more noble than the conquerors. The inferiority of the conquered races shows itself in the subordinate rank of their gods. Admitted by favour into the Hellenic Olympus, they never show themselves very high, and only attain to being the heralds and messengers of the others. What is Apollo in effect if he is not the incarnation of the Dorian genius? Nothing mystic in his worship, nothing orgiastic, nothing of that wild enthusiasm which characterised the Phrygian modes of worship. Hostile to the industrious and agricultural gods of the Pelasgians, the ideal type of the Dorian has no other mission than that of the warrior, to avenge, to protect, and punish; labour is beneath him. What is Artemis on her side if she is not the feminine personification of the same genius, the Dorian virgin whom a masculine education has rendered equal to man, chaste, proud, mistress of herself, and having no need of either protector or master? We are far from these Pelasgic gods, scarcely freed from the universe, covered with sweat and smoke, just as they have come from the workshops of Nature, displaying without shame their simple obscenity!

Here these are immaculate gods, free from striving and trouble; physical phenomena no longer fill the canvas of divine myths; humanity definitively takes the uppermost.

Endowed with an admirable historic intuition, with a

mind just and refined, Ottfried Müller has marked out the way for a truly scientific mythology, and we could believe that had it not been for the deplorable accident which deprived science of one so young,<sup>1</sup> he would have corrected that which was a little too fixed in his first method. Such is the fluidity and inconsequence of antique myths, that no exclusive system is applicable, and we cannot be allowed an affirmation in a matter so delicate without the condition to subject it to numberless limitations which may affect that which has been previously affirmed. When, for example, we say, Apollo is a Dorian god, Apollo does not at first present any solar character; nothing better, if we do not pretend by that to declare that it is merely a general trait. Otherwise, M. Creuzer will show that the identity of Helios and Apollo was not at first so apparent as it was later on; that it did not the less exist at the bottom of the Greek idea, and that the arrows of the divine archer are also the rays of the planet which darts life and death. Alas! the unhappy Ottfried ought to feel the fatal influence. "The unlucky," writes M. Welcker to the translator of the *Symbolique*, "he has always misunderstood the solar divinity of Apollo. Was it necessary that the god should revenge himself by making him feel, in the very ruins of his temple, how many of his characteristics are still terrible to those who venture to defy them?"

M. Preller,<sup>2</sup> in all deference, may be considered as continuing the method of Ottfried Müller. In his eyes also the mystic element of Greek religion belongs to the Thracians and the Pelasgians. The fundamental idea of Pelasgic worship was the adoration of Nature, regarded as living and divine, of the earth, and above all, of the earth-born divinities. In opposition to the Naturalism of the

<sup>1</sup> He died at Athens in 1849, of the consequences of a sunstroke, which he had when visiting the ruins of Delphos.

<sup>2</sup> *Demeter and Persephone*. Hamburg, 1837.



Pelasgians M. Preller places the anthropomorphism of the Hellenes, represented by the Homeric age, where the national and popular mythology is founded in a definitive manner; but when the torrent of that warlike epoch had passed off to the time of Solon and Pisistratus, there had been a kind of reaction in favour of ancient modes of worship, which expressed itself in two forms—Orphism and Mystery—both sufficiently modern, both mixed with some degree of imposture, both taken up later on by the Neo-platonists with eagerness.

The distinction of the epochs is thus the foundation of the studies of M. Preller: the gods have their chronology as well as their nationality. In general, antiquity quickly wearies itself with its symbols; a worship does not retain them for more than a hundred years; fashion, as in our days, goes for much in devotion. Religion, being one of the living products of humanity, ought to live, that is to say, change with her. In our churches do the saints of the most ancient date and the best quality enjoy the most favours and receive the most vows and prayers? Greece in this respect gives herself ample scope, and more often treats her gods, not according to their merits or their age, but according to their youth and their pleasing behaviour. The least god coming from abroad was soon sure to obtain more worshippers than those who had been longest in possession. It is thus that the Cabeiri, deformed dwarfs from Samothrace, were relegated to their forges and their bellows. Almost all the Pelasgic divinities had to undergo affronts of this kind. The old Pan is hardly allowed to come in with the retinue of Dionysus, a young god who is quite in the fashion. Hermes, the great Pelasgic god, stuck in his sheath, is reduced to keep the corner of the roads and to show the way to travellers. Honest Vulcan, the conscientious worker, only mounts to Olympus to be kicked by Jupiter and to be rebuffed by

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Venus, he who was so serviceable and so laborious. All these ancient gods of an industrious people—smith-gods, agricultural gods, shepherd-gods, divinities sad, serious, useful, little endowed with beauty—become demigods, satellites, or servants of the more noble gods. In general, the *heroes* represent the foreign gods, who do not take rank among the national divinities or the unclassed divinities, who are no longer objects of popular superstition. Rarely, indeed, were the dethroned gods without compensation. The new mode of worship did not destroy the anterior worship, it only cast it into the shade; more often they were assimilated by being brought, as it were, into a vast crucible where the myths and the attributes of the most ancient gods were recast under a new name. Thus the myths of Ceres and Proserpine absorbed almost all the others. Thus the Sabazian mysteries of Phrygia were fortunate when they were engrafted on those of Bacchus.

It was on the occasion of the introduction of the Sabazian mysteries, towards the seventh century before our era, that the Greeks displayed that singular curiosity as to foreign rites which St. Paul, an excellent observer, gives as one of the traits of their character.<sup>1</sup>

The worship of Atys, of Cybele, and of Adonis, with their noisy orgies, their shoutings, their wild and licentious genius, shocked the pure taste of the Greeks. There was, moreover, a dead god, Zagreus, who made all at once an enormous fortune. This was Dionysus himself, the god always young, who was supposed to be struck in his flower, like Adonis, whom they honoured with a bloody worship. Repulsed with disgust by men of intelligence and honest people, these worships were conducted by coarse impostors (*mystics, metragyrtes, orpheotelists, theophorites*), imitators of the shameful vices of the Phrygian

<sup>1</sup> Acts of the Apostles, xvii. 22.



priests, who scoured the streets and crossways, and made dupes among the credulous crowds. They remitted sins for money ; they trafficked in indulgences ; they composed philtres and cured diseases. "After these friars of the mother of the gods," says one of the speakers at the banquet of Athene, "by Jupiter, this is the most detestable race I know."

Thus we find the Oriental influence, which M. Creuzer has exaggerated so greatly, reduced to its proper value. If we abstract the origins, this influence has but a modern date, and shows the degradation rather than the progress of Hellenic worship. The barbarous element rather slips in at first by assuming the appearance and colour of the Greek myth. Later on, foreign worships hardly take the trouble to change their clothing. Isis, Serapis, Mithra come to be enthroned in Greece under their exotic apparel, like as it were a prelude to those monstrous amalgamations where the superstitions of the East and those of the West, the excesses of religious sentiment and those of philosophic thought, astrology and magic, theurgy and Neo-platonic ecstasy, seem to join hands.

All the progress of mythological study since M. Creuzer, is limited, as we see, to distinguishing the times, the places, and the races, which the illustrious author of the *Symbolique* has too often confused. M. Creuzer makes the history of Paganism after the same method as the old school made the history of Christianity—like a body of doctrines always identical, and passing through the ages without any vicissitudes other than those which arise from external circumstances. But if modern criticism has revealed anything to us, it is that in the infinite variety of times and of places there is nothing substantial enough to be held fixed, as it were, under the eye, and that the history of the human mind, in order to be sincere, should offer the picture of perpetual motion.

## III.

With so rich a range of study before him, M. Guigniaut's method was already traced. The learned Academician could very well have added another system to those which Germany had created: he preferred to put aside hypotheses, and reserved to himself the more delicate task of discussing them, not with the view of merely refuting, but with the intention of exercising high impartiality and intelligent conciliation. In doing that, he has only followed the line laid down by serious minds in France during the nineteenth century. The character of the nineteenth century is criticism; but the systems have been otherwise useful and necessary, for a great development of ideas in a given sense is not generally produced except by a contest of rival schools. History is the proof of this; but the spectacle of the human mind of our days establishes in a manner not less evident, that the day of systems has gone by, the masters not having authority enough to form a school, or the pupils docility enough to accept exclusive direction.

Eclecticism is, in this sense, the obligatory method of our age, and of France in particular. The intellectual temperament of France is but a medium between opposite qualities, a compromise between extremes, something clear, simple, and temperate. We do not complain of this, for it is perhaps, after all, the combination of mental faculties to which is given the power of grasping the truth. Schools are in science what parties are in politics: each one is right by turns; it is impossible for an enlightened man to shut himself up in one of them so exclusively as to shut his eyes to what the others hold to be reasonable.

It is, moreover, towards those questions relating to wor-



ships and mysteries that M. Guigniaut has considered he ought to direct the efforts of his criticism. These questions, indeed, are on one side much more important than those which concern myths. The purely mythological part of ancient religions has for antiquity itself nothing dogmatic or definite. The same myth is never presented by two authors in exactly the same manner; each reserves in this respect the liberty of embellishing at his pleasure, as if the myths were nothing more than romantic tales, which the author alters and shapes according as he thinks fit. Mysteries, on the contrary, appear to have been the really serious part of ancient religions. What, then, were these mysteries, around which imagination, the spirit of system, and false learning are pleased to collect the clouds? What were the Eleusinian in particular, upon the majesty and holiness of which antiquity has but one voice? Doubt upon this subject is not now permitted; we can describe almost as well as if we had been initiated, the different scenes of that which Clement of Alexandria calls the mystic drama of Eleusis. Let us recall at first that the name of *mystery* has been borrowed by the Church from Pagan language, and we do not fear to have recourse for the explanation in the original sense to the means which the Church has employed, nor do we fear to commit an anachronism in referring to the *mysteries* of the Middle Ages. Let us represent the primitive Christian mystery, the prototype of the mass. What do we find it? A grand symbolical act accompanied by significant ceremonies. Let us take the Christian worship at a more advanced period of its development; let us follow the ceremonies of the Holy Week in a cathedral of the Middle Ages. What do we see then? A mystical drama, rites commemorative of an historical fact, or what is considered as such, alternations of joy and grief continued for several days, a complicated symbolism, an imitation of



facts intended to be recalled, often even scenic representations more or less direct, where the divine story is brought sensibly before the eyes of the spectators.

Setting aside the immense superiority of the Christian dogma, and the spirit of high morality which pervades its legend, and to which nothing in antiquity can be compared, perhaps, if we were allowed to assist in an ancient mystery, we should not see any other thing: symbolic spectacles where the mystagogue was actor and spectator at the same time, a collection of representations founded on a pious fable and relating always to the passage of a god upon the earth, to his passion, to his descent into hell, to his return to life. So far this was the death of Adonis; so far this was the mutilation of Atys; so far the murder of Zagreus or of Sabazius. Above all, a legend lent itself marvellously to commemorative representations: such was that of Ceres and Proserpine. All the circumstances of this myth, all the incidents of the search for Proserpine by her mother, afford scope for a picturesque symbolism which powerfully captivated the imagination. They imitated the acts of the goddess, they felt in themselves the sentiments of joy or of grief which had successively animated her. There was at first a long procession, intermingled with burlesque scenes, purification wakes, young people merrymaking, running with torches at night, representing the searches of the mother, circuits in the dark, terrors, anxieties, then all at once splendid brightness. The porches of the temples were opened, the actors were received in delightful places where they heard voices. Changes of scene, produced by theatrical machinery, added to the illusion; recitations (we have a type of them in the Homeric hymn to Ceres) completed the cycle of representations. Each day had its name, its exercises, its games, its stations, that the mystics did in company. One day it was a little war or *lithoboly*, when they attacked one another with stones; another day



they rendered homage to the *Mater Dolorosa* (*Da Mater Achæa*), probably a statue representing Ceres in *addolorata*, a true *pieta*. Another day they drank the *cyceon*; they imitated the pleasantries by which old Iambus succeeded in cheering up the goddess; they went in procession to places near Eleusis, to the sacred fig-tree, and to the sea; they ate certain dishes; they practised mystical rites, of which the sense was almost lost to those who did them. They mixed in ceremonial orgies, dances, nightly *fêtes*, with symbolic instruments. On their return, they gave full vent to joy; burlesque resumed its place in the *gephyrisms* or farces of the bridge of Cephisus. When the initiated arrived at the bridge over the Cephisus, the people of the neighbouring places ran from all parts to see the procession; they spread themselves on the holy flock with sarcasms and licentious pleasantries, to which the others responded with equal freedom. Doubtless they all joined in these scenes of comic grotesque, a kind of mummery of which the influence on the first rough model of dramatic art remains perceptible. Ceremonies which comprehended a symbolism so vague under a realism so coarse had for the ancients a great charm, and left a deep impression; they brought together again that which men like most in works of imagination—a very definite form and a hardly decided sense. Their repute depended in a great degree upon the manner in which they were performed, and this was with an exceptional magnificence, so that the mysteries of Eleusis eclipsed all the others, and excited the envy of the whole world.

Such, then, were these mysteries. We can hardly say that they were entirely mystical in the sense adopted by M. Creuzer, nor entirely devoid of meaning, as M. Lobeck would desire to make out. We ought not to seek in them either a superior revelation, or a high moral teaching, or a profound philosophy. The symbol there was in itself its

proper end. Do you believe that the women who celebrated the mysteries of Adonis thought much of the mysterious sense of the acts they performed? All this explains itself when we say that Adonis is the sun, passing for one six months through the superior signs of the zodiac, and for another six months through the inferior signs; that the boar which kills him is the winter; that it is he himself on the other side who is the annual vegetation, with its different seasons of flower-time, hay-time, &c. Can we doubt that these abstract considerations had as many charms for the Greek women? What was it made them rush in crowds to weep for Adonis?

The desire to weep for a young god blossomed so quickly, to see him laid on his funeral bier, exhausted in his bloom, his head hanging languidly, surrounded with oranges and plants of early vegetation which they had seen flower and die, to bury him with their hands, to cut their hair upon his tomb, and to lament and rejoice by turns, and, in a word, to experience all the impressions of fleeting joys and sad returns grouped around the myth of Adonis.

Thus, so far from the worship being always the consequence of a mystic legend accepted as a dogma, it was often the myth which subordinated itself to the instincts of the mob and furnished a pretext. We must recollect, besides, that since Christianity the word *faith* has assumed a sense which makes it, in questions of religious symbolics, almost a matter of indifference whether people understand or not. The impression produced is from the whole, and not from the understanding of each particular. We follow with pleasure these dramas which appeal to the sight, without troubling ourselves with the metaphysical meaning: it is all significant, it is true, but not directly so. Among the peasants who assist at a midnight mass, how many of them think of the mystery of the Incarnation? "Aristotle," says Synesius, "is of opinion



that the initiate do not learn anything exactly, but they are brought into a certain disposition of soul." The teaching of the mysteries was a sort of indirect teaching, analogous to that which a simple man receives when he assists in the offices of the Church without knowing Latin, and without comprehending the sense of all that he sees. It was like a sacrament operating by its own virtue, a pledge of salvation conferred by outward and visible signs and consecrated formulas. Baptism, in the first ages of the Church, was entirely open to all; but, nevertheless, it preserved the character of being an initiatory ceremony.

M. Lobeck has well shown that the conditions imposed on the initiated were so vague and illusory that the mysteries had neither privilege nor secrecy. It was truly haphazard. In order to be admitted, it was sufficient to be an Athenian or to have a godfather at Athens. Later on, the doors were entirely thrown open, and all those who could make the voyage were initiated. Without exaggerating the moral and philosophical part of these mysteries, of which we must confess we think little enough, and without dwelling longer on those practices, which to us appear dull and insignificant, we cannot deny that they have powerfully helped to train religious tradition and human morality. "For a long time," says M. Guigniaut, "the mysteries quieted souls by these august ceremonies, which revealed the destiny of man in the transparent history of the great goddesses of the initiation, and which, in purifying him, renders him worthy to live under their rule and to partake of their immortality."

"It is certain that the mysteries of Eleusis in particular had a moral and religious influence, which comforted life in the present, and taught after a manner a life to come, which was promised as a reward to the initiated under certain conditions, not only of purity and piety, but also of justice; and if they did not equally teach monotheism,

or that which would have been the negation of Paganism itself, they at least approached as near to it as Paganism was permitted to do. They led to and nourished in the soul, under the very title of mystery, a pure worship of Nature, a sentiment of the infinite and of God, which, after all, rests at the foundation of popular belief, but which mythological anthropomorphism tends incessantly to overthrow."

It is, however, on another ground, I wish to say, as having served for the transition between Paganism and the most holy religion which has replaced it, that the mysteries are worthy above all to fix the attention of the philosopher and the critic. Profound researches have shown that almost everything in Christianity not brought from the Gospel is but the baggage removed from the mysteries of Paganism in the hostile camp.<sup>1</sup> The primitive Christian worship was only a mystery. All the interior management of the church, the grades of initiation, the prescription of silence, a number of the peculiarities of ecclesiastical language,<sup>2</sup> have no other origin. The revolution which has destroyed Paganism seems at first sight to be an abrupt breaking away, entirely cut short as respected the past; and such it was in effect, if we only consider the dogmatic inflexibility and the spirit of severe morality which characterised the new religion; but as affecting modes of worship and exterior customs, the change operated very gradually, and popular faith saved the most familiar symbols from the general shipwreck. Christianity at first brought so little change into the inner and social life, that it remains uncertain whether a great number of people in the fourth and fifth centuries were Pagans or

<sup>1</sup> See the work of M. Creuzer, vol. iii. p. 774, and the note of M. Guignaut, p. 1205.

<sup>2</sup> The word *mystery* is often used by St. Paul. That (*epopte*) that is initiated in the third and highest degree of the mysteries of Eleusis is to be found in the Second Epistle attributed to St. Peter.



Christians. Many appeared to have followed an undecided course between the two worships. Art, on its side, which formed an essential part of the ancient religion, had hardly broken with any of its traditions.<sup>1</sup> Primitive Christian art is really only Pagan art in decadence, when taken in the lower branches. The Good Shepherd of the Catacombs of Rome, copied from the Aristeus or the Apollo Nomios, who were sculptured in the same position upon the Pagan tombs, carries still the flute of Pan in the midst of the four half-naked Seasons. Upon the Christian tombs in the cemetery of St. Calixtus, Orpheus charms the animals; elsewhere Christ as Jupiter Pluto, Mary as Proserpine, receive the souls brought to them in the presence of the three Fates. Mercury, with the winged hat and carrying in his hand the caduceus; Pegasus, the symbol of deification; Psyche, symbol of the immortality of the soul; Heaven, personified by an old man; the river Jordan, Victory, were sculptured on a number of Christian monuments. Who can see without emotion those churches of Rome built from the remains of ancient temples, like the patchwork Proba Falconia made with the verses of Virgil? It is thus with humanity. Collecting together old broken fragments out of the dust, she constructs a new edifice, full of originality. For her the spirit is everything, the materials are next to nothing.

We must therefore look upon the mysteries as a great transformation, which religions of antiquity underwent from the moment when the infantile imaginations of the first ages could no longer satisfy the new requirements of conscience, and the human mind wished for a religion more dogmatic and more serious. Primitive polytheism, vague and indecisive, left to individual interpretation, was

<sup>1</sup> This is what results from the collection of sculptured monuments by which M. Guigniaut has endeavoured to show the transition from Pagan symbolism to Christian symbolism. Vol. iv. fig. 9c8, and following.

no longer sufficient for a reflective epoch. Epicurean incredulity on the one side made sport of the innocent divinities; on the other side, more elevated and more delicate religious ideas gained ground at the expense of ancient simplicity. The aspirations towards monotheism and moral religion—aspirations of which Christianity was the highest expression—gained on all sides. Paganism itself could not escape from them. I do not much admire, I confess, the attempt of which Julian, in the eyes of history, bears the responsibility. In whatever degree primitive mythology may appear amiable and beautiful to me in its simplicity, to such a degree is this Neo-paganism, this religion of the archæologist and the sophist, dull and insignificant. It seems to have lost the sense of beauty which constituted the foundation of Hellenic religion. The monstrous gods of the East, conceived beyond all proportion, replaced the harmonious creations of Greece. A god, Magnus Pantheus, a god hidden and without name, threatened to overwhelm everything. Worship ends in the bloody sacrifice of a bull; religious sentiment seeks refuge in the scenes of the slaughter-house; we have recourse to blood in order to appease irritated and jealous gods; a profound terror seems to have dictated all the vows which have been transmitted to us by the inscriptions.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of all this there was an absolute impossibility of founding anywhere a moral teaching like the Christian homily.

It is from not having looked upon antique religion until the time of its decadence that we have judged so ill of it. We must confess that at the time of Constantine or of Julian, Paganism was a very mediocre religion, and the attempts made to reform it ended in satisfying no one.

Criticism could hardly at once confirm the sentence

<sup>1</sup> See the *Journal des Savants* of the month of January 1850 (article of M. Hase).



which had been passed upon the old worship. If she accepts the ground of the judgment, she cannot but exclaim against the partiality of the judges. The contest in which Paganism succumbed was dull, violent, and conducted in bad faith, as all polemical contests are conducted. Strange! nothing so much resembles it as the attack by which, in the eighteenth century, it was thought that an end had been put to Christianity. No dogma could withstand such assaults. Read the *Derision des Philosophes Païens* by Hermias, the writings of Tatian and Athenagoras against Paganism, and it becomes easy to understand Voltaire diverting his readers with the awkward things in the Bible. Controversialists in general, thinking only to find their opponents at fault, give way too often to the temptation of presenting as ridiculous the doctrine they should confute, in order to have the advantage of exposing the absurdity—a convenient method, for there is nothing which cannot be taken in a ridiculous light; but it is a very dangerous method, for invariably it is returned against those who use it. Some Fathers of the Church have used it with frightful prodigality. For the most part, they seized on the evhemeristic system, and used it as a weapon against Paganism—a Paganism half understood. They attacked, hand to hand, gods the offspring of fancy, and in this easy kind of combat triumphed over shadows. Others took up a system coarser still, the demonological hypothesis. The gods were only demons; they were demons who uttered the oracles. "The demons," says Tertullian, "took the place of gods; they introduced themselves into the statues, they inhaled the incense and drank the blood of the victims."<sup>1</sup> Others, at last boldly joining hands with Lucretius and Epicurus, declared that the myths were only frivolous fables, invented for pleasure, without an object and without meaning. It is very

<sup>1</sup> *Apo'logétique*, chaps. xxii. xxiv.

remarkable (and this ingenious observation has not escaped M. Creuzer) that the Fathers, born in the East, and educated with a respect for Paganism, or in the schools of the philosophers, preserved something of the delicate sentiment of Greece. This work of demolition by calumny and misunderstanding wounded them deeply, and they showed themselves almost as severe against the Evhemerists as the honest Pagans themselves. Origen and St. Gregory of Nazianzen, for example, often judged Paganism with remarkable impartiality, and upon several points anticipated the most delicate sketches of the modern critic. Certainly we can believe that many of the reproaches addressed to Paganism by the Fathers of the Church, and in particular to the mysteries, were not without foundation; but was it fair to thus take Paganism on its lowest ground in the popular meaning? The most elevated religious ideas degenerate among sensual people into sensualism and superstition. It is as if we were to judge Catholicism by what we see at Naples and Loretto. The picture of the Thesmophoria and the Adonia, such as we find it in Aristophanes and Theocritus, presents nothing very immoral, but only something light and not very serious. Drunkenness is the gravest of the abuses we find there; but he who has sometimes seen a *pardon* in pious Brittany may well believe that the principal object of the meeting is to drink. The feasts of the martyrs in the primitive Church afforded scenes as little edifying as those against which the Fathers energetically raised their voices. As to the symbols adopted by Paganism, and which would in our eyes be grossly obscene, we must say with M. Creuzer, "that which civilised man hides with modesty and carefully conceals from sight, simple man has made, by right of Nature, in name and figure, a religious symbol for public worship." With this faith, which places God in Nature, and with the freer manners of a Southern people,



above all of Greeks, all these distinctions of decent or indecent, worthy or unworthy of divine majesty, could not make themselves felt. From thence it is that these people, with an innocence already as foreign to the Romans of the time of the Empire as to modern Europe, admitted into their religions those sacred legends which we think scandalous, and these emblems which we charge with obscenity. We are bound to believe that these emblems revealed to the ancients ideas entirely different from those with which they inspire us, since they only excited amongst them feelings of sanctity and religious respect. What more revolting, according to our notions, than to find at each crossway and the corner of the roads an obscene landmark? Yet that shocked the ancients so little that we find Hipparchus ordering moral sentences to be engraved on the Hermes for the edification of the passers-by. We must say thus much of the ridicule which has so large a place in Hellenic Paganism. Religions ought to represent in a most complete manner all the aspects of the human mind, and burlesque being one of the aspects under which we conceive life, burlesque is an element essential to all religions. Take the epochs and religious countries, for example, the Middle Ages, Italy and Spain. What irreverence! What a flood of fables on the Virgin, the saints, on God himself! Those who have seen the Italian mode of worship, know how indefinite is the limit which separates the serious from the comic, and by what insensible transition devotion passes into pleasantry. We are surprised to see upon the monuments of grave Etruria the most respectable scenes turned into caricature. We do not understand how a people who condemned Socrates on suspicion of impiety should have allowed Aristophanes to give drubbings to Bacchus on the stage, and transform Hercules into a kitchen drudge. The Southern people, more familiar with the gods than the reflective people of

the North, feel from time to time the necessity of laughing with them. In the unrestrained behaviour of the Neapolitans towards St. Januarius there is nothing which ought to surprise us. It is eighteen hundred years since the people of Pompeii, when they wished to obtain anything from their gods, made their conditions in writing, and for greater efficacy they threatened them with blows.

Monotheism has become such an essential element of our intellectual constitution, that all our efforts to understand the polytheism of the ancients seem to be almost useless. The human mind becomes necessarily monotheistic when it has arrived at a certain degree of development; but this conception of the divinity is very far from being found equally in the infancy of all races. There are monotheistic races, like races of polytheists, and this difference is derived from an original diversity in the manner of regarding Nature. In the Arab or Semitic conception, Nature does not live—the desert is monotheistic. Sublime in its immense uniformity, it reveals from the first the idea of the infinite, but not that sentiment of fecund activity with which an incessantly creative Nature has inspired the Indo-European race. This, then, is why Arabia has always been the bulwark of monotheism. Nature takes no place in Semitic religions; they are all of the head, all metaphysical and psychological. The extreme simplicity of the Semitic mind, without breadth, without diversity, without plastic art, without philosophy, without mythology, without political life and without progress, has no other cause: there is no variety in monotheism.

Exclusively struck with the unity of government which shines in the world, the Semitic people have only seen in the development of things the accomplishment of the will of a superior being. God is: God made the heaven and the earth—that is all their philosophy. Such



is not the conception of that other race, destined to exhaust all the conditions of life, who from India to Greece, from Greece to the extreme North and West, has everywhere animated and deified Nature, from the living statue of Homer to the living ship of the Scandinavians. For her the distinction of God and no God has always been undecided. Engaged in the world, the gods ought to share in its vicissitudes : they had a history, successive generations, dynasties, fights. Jupiter is now the king of the gods and men, but his reign will not be more eternal than that of Chronos. Prometheus enchained has predicted that his art will be less strong than Time, and that some day he will have to give way to necessity.

Religion of antiquity was, like ancient society, founded upon exclusion ; it was a liberal and national religion ; it was not made for the slave or for the stranger. The first condition exacted for admission to the mysteries was to declare that one was not a barbarian. Ancient Greece showed itself even more exclusive. There each promontory, each brook, each village, each mountain had its legend. The worship of the woman was not the worship of the man ; the worship of the sailor was not that of the farmer ; that of the farmer was not that of the soldier. Hercules and the Dioscuri, in order to take part in the Eleusinian mysteries, were obliged to get themselves adopted by the Athenians. Rome prepared the great idea of catholicity : all the gods became common to all civilised people ; but the barbarian and the slave were still under religious incapacity, and it was a singular novelty when St. Paul dared to say, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor master, there is neither man nor woman ; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." It would be to do violence to our association of the most decided ideas if we did not see progress in this ; but equality is always bought dear, and we may conceive that the conservative

party of the fourth and fifth centuries, composed of men well brought up and attached to the traditions of the past, would constantly repeat, "Oh, our fathers were happy! Oh, our fathers were indeed favoured by the times!"<sup>1</sup> The grand liberal life of the five epochs of antiquity became impossible on the day (blessed, however, be that day!) when the slave was looked upon as a religious being and capable of merit. The gods of Olympus were only for the free; not a wrinkle on their forehead, not a ray of sadness; human nature always taken in its nobility; no count of grief. But those who suffer wish their gods to suffer with them; and this is why, to as many as have griefs in the world, Christianity will always be the explanation. Such is the secret of the divine paradox, "Happy are those who weep!"

Far be it from me to attempt here one of those parallelisms in which we are obliged to be unjust to the past if we would not wish to do wrong to the present. Paganism, thanks to that great number of works in which France and Germany have so happily combined their efforts, ought not to be in our hands either a weapon for the polemic or mere food for the curious. For the educated mind, the spectacle of such long aberrations causes neither disdain nor pity; it is the conviction of a great fact. Humanity is religious, and the necessary form of all religion is symbolism. The symbol may from its nature be insufficient, and condemned to remain beneath the idea it represents. The attempt to define the infinite and to show it to the sight implies an impossibility; that is too clear to derive merit from saying it. All expression has a limit; the only language which may not be unworthy of divine things is silence. But human nature does not resign itself to this. If man reflects in the presence of

<sup>1</sup> See the fine work of M. Beugnot upon the *Destruction of Paganism in the West*. Paris, 1837.



the mystery of the divine existence, he arrives in spite of himself at this question: Would it not be better to leave these figures where they are, and give up the idea of expressing the ineffable? It is not less certain that humanity, left to its instincts, is not stayed by any such scruple; it prefers to talk imperfectly about God to remaining silent; it likes better to trace a fantastic picture of the divine world than to resist the invincible charm which leads towards the invisible.

Thus the immense work of which we have endeavoured to furnish the history, leads but to one conclusion, consoling and religious at the same time; for if a man by a spontaneous effort aspires to seize the infinite cause and strives to pass nature, is it not a great sign that by his origin and his destiny he goes beyond the narrow limit of finite things?

In the view of these ceaseless efforts to scale heaven we make an estimate of human nature, and we are persuaded that this nature is noble, and that it has grounds for being proud. Then, too, we assure ourselves against the menaces of the future. All that we love, all that constitutes in our eyes the ornament of life, liberal cultivation of the mind, science, grand art, may be destined to endure but for a time; but religion will never die. It is the eternal protest of the soul against systematic or brutal materialism, which would imprison man in the lower region of the vulgar life. Civilisation has intermissions, but religion has not.

THE  
HISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

IT is the property of great things to suffer themselves to be comprehended from several different points of view and to grow larger with the human mind itself, so that each one according to his degree of culture, and each age according as it understands the past more or less deeply, finds from different motives something to admire. When the critics of antiquity and those of the seventeenth century communicated to us the beauties which they thought they had discovered in Homer, the childishness of their æsthetics astonished us: we admire Homer as much as they did, but for other reasons entirely. When Bossuet and M. de Chateaubriand think to admire the Bible in admiring its misunderstandings and nonsense,<sup>1</sup> educated Germany has the right to smile. However, the admiration of Herder and Ewald, though being better founded, is not less free from it. The more we contemplate the world and the past as they are, without regard to conventional and preconceived ideas, the more we shall find true beauty; and it is in this sense that we can say

<sup>1</sup> "In order to understand the beauty of the Vulgate," says M. de Maistre, "make choice of a friend *who may not be a Hebraist*, and you will see how a syllable, a word—I hardly know how to phrase it lightly enough—will bring before your eyes beauties of the first order" (*Soirées de Saint Petersbourg*, vii<sup>e</sup> entret.). Behold, certainly, a convenient æstheticism, fit for a gentleman! Would you, in order to understand the beauties of Homer, make choice of a friend who was not a Hellenist, and he will discover for you in the translation of Mme. Dacier a thousand beauties of the first order which Homer never dreamed of!



science is the first condition of real admiration. Jerusalem has come out more brilliant and more beautiful from the work of being apparently the destroyer of modern science; the pious tales which amused our infancy whilst in the nursery have become, thanks to a wholesome interpretation, great truths; and it is to us, who now see Israel in her real beauty, it is to us the critics that it belongs to say truly: *Stantes erant pedes nostri in atriis tuis, Jerusalem!* Our feet were standing at thine altars, O Jerusalem!

If we regard the development of the Hebrew mind in its entirety, we cannot but be struck with the high character of absolute perfection which gives to its works the right to be regarded as *classics*, in the same sense as the productions of Greece, Rome, and the Latin people. Alone, among all the people of the East, Israel has had the privilege of writing for the whole world. The Vedas certainly constitute admirable poetry. However, this collection of the first songs of the race from which we take them will never replace in the expression of our religious sentiments the Psalms, the work of a race so different from our own. The literatures of the East cannot in general be read and appreciated by any except the learned. Hebraic literature, on the contrary, is the Bible, the book above all, the universal reading. Millions of men know no other poetry. It must, without doubt, have made, in this astonishing destiny, the kind of religious revolution which, since the sixteenth century, has made us regard the Hebrew books as the source of all revelation. But we can affirm that if these books had not contained something profoundly universal they would not have attained such a degree of importance. Proportion, measure, and taste were in the East the exclusive privilege of the Hebrew people. Israel had, like Greece, the gift of enunciating perfectly its ideas, and of expressing them in a compact and complete

manner, and by that it succeeded in giving to thoughts and sentiments a general form acceptable to all human nature.

Thanks to this universal adoption, no history is more popular than that of Israel, but no history has been longer in being understood. It is the fate of literature which becomes the foundation of religious belief to contract the rigidity of dogma and to lose its real character in becoming a recognised symbolism where one goes to search for arguments to support every cause. From the history of a people the most opposed to monarchy who have ever existed, Bossuet was able to draw a justification of the policy of Louis XIV.; another has concluded from it in favour of a theocracy; another in favour of a republic. Germany, from the very first, with that gift of historic intuition which seems specially adapted for the primitive epochs, perceived the truth, and framed the history of the Jewish people as a history like any other; not according to theological views agreed on beforehand, but according to a critical and grammatical study of the texts. The work of Biblical exegesis, constructed stone by stone with a marvellous concatenation and an incomparable tenacity of method, is, without contradiction, the masterpiece of German genius, and the most perfect model we can propose for other branches of philology. Already, several years before the Reformation, Germany had made the science of Hebrew its own proper province, of which it has not since been dispossessed. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, criticism, checked in France by the narrow spirit of the theologians,<sup>1</sup> or led away by the want of intelligence which characterised the school of Voltaire

<sup>1</sup> This check is the more regrettable because the seventeenth century had a superior man, Richard Simon of the Oratory, who, notwithstanding the obstacles which were raised, had created in France a healthy exegesis an age before Germany had begun it.



in matters of history, made marvellous progress among the Germans; and after the generations of Michaelis, Eichhorn, Rosenmüller, De Wette, Winer, and Gesenius, we may well believe that there was nothing more to be done within the circle of Hebraic studies. M. Ewald, however, has proved, in these later years, by numerous writings, and above all by his splendid *History of the People of Israel*,<sup>1</sup> that the part of the great critic in this ever new field is far from being exhausted. By the boldness of his views, his penetration of mind, his brilliant imagination, the marvellous sentiment he possesses with respect to religious and poetic things, M. Ewald has far surpassed all those who had previously occupied themselves with the history and literature of the Hebrew people. Some defects, it is true, may obscure these rare merits; the extreme fineness of the sketches degenerates occasionally to subtlety; he does not always stop soon enough in the way of conjecture. The origin of the people of Israel, the patriarchal epoch, the primitive fables, are treated too arbitrarily in the endeavour to reconcile them with mythologies entirely foreign to the Hebrew spirit. The description of the later ages of Jewish history, of those which immediately preceded and prepared Christianity, is coloured throughout with the particular opinions of M. Ewald with regard to religion and philosophy—opinions to which we can hardly deny the character of a singular originality, and in which the author believes he can combine a sort of Christian fanaticism with the most avowed rationalism.<sup>2</sup> The best part of the work of M.

<sup>1</sup> *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, 4 vols. in 8vo, 2nd edit. Göttingen, 1834.

<sup>2</sup> There are above all the *Jahrbücher der biblischen Wissenschaft*, an annual collection published by M. Ewald, and full of his ideas, which should be read to understand the singular part taken by him in the political and religious questions arising in Germany. This part, in which the savant and the historian combine in the strangest fashion with the preacher and the sectary, would be an inexplicable phenomenon if we did not recall

Ewald is the narrative of the purely Hebraic period, from Samuel to the Maccabees. The history of David and Solomon, the part of the Prophets, the various religious revolutions of the epoch of the Kings, the time of the Captivity, the character of Hebraic poetry, and above all, that of the Psalms, constitute a marvellous exposition, which might possibly be rectified on some points, but not surpassed as a whole and general conception. Why should the learned professor of Göttingen commit the fault of mingling so many beautiful and brilliant sketches and pages full of enthusiasm with a bitter polemic against persons whose opinions often differ only by a shade from his own? Why, in particular, should M. Ewald believe that he is obliged to lower a man like Gesenius, who could not in any wise compare with him for philosophy and æsthetic sentiment, but who has not been surpassed as a philologist and as a grammarian? M. Ewald, if superior to his rival in poetic intelligence and elevation of mind, has no need to deny to him those solid qualities in order to shine himself in the first rank among the critics and exegetes of our age.

## I.

A preliminary question dominates all these problems relative to the people of Israel: How were those documents which serve for the foundation of the history of the Hebrews reduced to writing? above all, the five most ancient parts of their annals, that we are accustomed to reunite under the name of the Pentateuch? According to an hypothesis presented to the last age like a bold

the strong impression which the study of the Prophets has made upon the mind of M. Ewald—an impression which betrays itself simply in his conduct and his writings.



paradox, and which is now adopted by all the enlightened critics in Germany,<sup>1</sup> the Pentateuch was formed by the reunion of historic fragments from various sources.

The distinction of basis and form is a distinction most essential in primitive literature, and above all in Hebraic literature, for none has undergone so much overrunning. We can affirm, for example, that we found in the Books of Exodus and Numbers information at once authentic and contemporaneous upon the state and doings of the Israelites in the desert, from thence almost to Sinai. Must we conclude from this that the Books of Exodus and Numbers such as we possess, date from that epoch? No, certainly. The definitive compilation of the books which contain the ancient history of Israel does not go back probably to the eighth century before our era. By the side of ancient fragments, preserved in a manner almost textual, may be found parts much more modern, and to which ought to be applied principles of criticism entirely different.

The keen and learned philologists who in Germany have devoted themselves to the discussion of this curious problem have seen clearly that it is in the latter times where they ought to seek the analogy of the laws which have governed the successive transformations of the historic writings of the Hebrews. It is in Arabic historiography. When we compare, indeed, the one with the other, the various classes of Mussulman historians, we recognise that almost all reproduce from an identical basis, of which the

<sup>1</sup> This assertion, contrary to the notions generally entertained in France, has need of development, which ought not to find place here; but one can read in the work of M. Ewald, and in Langerke, *Kanaan*, pref.; De Wette, *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, 150 and following; Stæhelin, *Kritische Untersuchungen über den Pentateuch*, 1843; Tuch, *Kommentar über die Genesis*, Halle, 1838. We can consult in French the *Palestine* of M. S. Munk (Paris, 1845), in the collection of *L'Univers Pittoresque* of Didot, p. 132 and following, where the question, with an excellent criticism, is treated in the sense we have indicated.

first compilation is found in the Chronicle of Tabari. The work of Tabari itself is only a collection of traditions, arranged so as to follow each other, without the slightest regard to criticism, full of repetitions, contradictions, and derogations from the natural order of facts. In Ibn-al-Athir, who marks a degree of more advanced compilation, the account is continuous, the contradictions are scattered. The narrator has chosen a time for all the traditions which appear to him to be more probable, and passes over the others in silence. The more modern "they says" are inserted here and there, but at the bottom it is always the same history as that in Tabari, with some variations, and also some misconceptions, as though the second compiler had not thoroughly understood the text which he had before him. In Ibn-Khaldoun at last the compilation has, if I may dare to say so, passed once more to the crucible. The author brings into his recital his personal views; we see his opinions and the end he is seeking. It is a history arranged, completed, a view, as across a prism, of the ideas of the writer.

The Hebraic historiographer has traversed analogous degrees. Deuteronomy presents to us history arrived at its last period—history retouched with an oratorical view, where the narrator does not propose merely to recount, but to edify. The four preceding books enable us to perceive the seams of the most ancient fragments reunited, but not assimilated, in a text following. We can differ upon the division of the parts, upon the number and character of the successive compilations; and we must avow that M. Ewald, in pursuing upon all these points a strictness impossible to attain, has passed the limits which a severe critic ought to impose; but we can no longer doubt as to the proceeding which brought the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua to their definitive state. It is clear that a *Jehovist* compiler (that is to say, employing in his narrative



the name of Jehovah) has given the last form to this great historic work in taking for its basis an *Elohistic* writing (that is to say, where God is designated by the word Elohim), of which we can at the present day reconstruct the essential parts.<sup>1</sup> As to the opinion, which attributes the compilation of the Pentateuch to Moses, it is above criticism altogether, and we have not to discuss it. This opinion, nevertheless, appears modern enough, for it is very certain that the ancient Hebrews never dreamed of regarding their legislator as an historian.<sup>2</sup> The narratives of the olden times appeared to them as works absolutely impersonal, to which they did not attach the name of any author. Thus was formed the fundamental writing of the Hebraic annals, that which M. Ewald calls the Book of the Origins, after which they grouped themselves successively—the annals of the Judges, the Kings, the time of the Captivity to Alexander. No people can boast assuredly of the possession of a body of history so complete, or of archives so regularly kept. That which is indeed important to maintain is, that in retouching the form the basis shall not be altered, so that the fragments thus reunited, which contain the history, whether historic or legendary, may have the value of original documents. The Pentateuch contained, according to all appearance, the information imprinted on the archives of the people neighbouring to Israel, such as the narrative of the war of the Iranian

<sup>1</sup> We ought to remark that this system, long since classical in Germany, has nothing in common with the unfortunate attempt of Dr. Donaldson to re-establish Jasher, one of the books cited in the most ancient annals of Israel. It is surprising that, in a recent article, we are presented, as the last word of the German exegesis, with a similar work, composed by a doctor of the University of Cambridge, and universally reprobated by the German critics.

<sup>2</sup> The opinion that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch hardly appears established before the Christian era. M. de Wette believes that even at this epoch it was not entirely accepted.

kings against the kings of the valley of Siddim, where Abraham figures as a stranger—Abraham, the Hebrew, who dwelt in the oak grove at Mamre of the Amorite; the genealogy of the Edomites; the curious synchronism established between the foundation of Hebron and that of Tanais in Egypt. The first pages, even, consecrated to antediluvian origins, all mythological as they appear, are certainly documents which bring us close to the origin of mankind.

It is impossible to understand Israel well without re-attaching it to the group to which it belonged—I mean the Semitic race, of which it is the highest and purest branch. The essential result of modern philology has been to show, in the history of civilisation, the action of a double current produced by two races entirely distinct in manners, language, and spirit—on the one part, the Indo-European race, embracing the noble populations of India, Persia, the Caucasus, and of all Europe; on the other, the race called by the very faulty name of Semitic,<sup>1</sup> comprising the populations indigenous to Asia west and south as far as the Euphrates. To the Indo-European race belong almost all the great military, political, and intellectual movements in the history of the world; to the Semitic race, the religious movements. The Indo-European race, pre-occupied with the variety of Nature, did not by itself reach monotheism. The Semitic race, on the contrary, guided by its firm and sure views, cleared away all at once the disguises of the divinity, and, without reflection or reasoning, adopted the purest religious form that humanity has ever known. Monotheism in the world has been the work of the Semitic apostolate in this sense, that before the

<sup>1</sup> This name here denotes, not the people given in Genesis as the offspring of Shem, but the people who speak or have spoken the language wrongly styled Semitic, that is to say, the Hebrews, Phœnicians, Syrians, Arabs, and Abyssinians.



action and without any action on the part of Judaism, Christianity, or Islamism, the worship of God, one and supreme, had not been formulated distinctly to the multitude. But these three great religious movements are three Semitic facts, three branches of the same stem, three unequally beautiful versions of the same idea. There are only some leagues between Jerusalem and Sinai and between Sinai and Mecca.

When and how did the Semitic race arrive at this notion of the divine unity which the world has admitted on the faith of their preaching? I believe it was from primitive intuition, and from their earliest time. They did not invent monotheism. India, which has thought with as much originality and depth, has not yet reached it, even in our time. All the strength of the Greek mind did not suffice to bring back humanity to it without the co-operation of the Semitic people. We can affirm of these that they never would have acquired the dogma of the divine unity if they had not found it in the most leading instincts of their heart and soul. The first religions of the Indo-European race appear to have been purely physical. They were vivid impressions, such as those of the wind on the trees or the reeds, those of flowing waters, of the sea, which were embodied in the imaginations of these infant people. The man of the Indo-European race is not so quickly able to separate himself from the world as the Semitic man. For a long time he adored his own sensations, and until the Semitic religions introduced to him a more elevated idea of the Divinity, his worship was but an echo of Nature. The Semitic race, on the contrary, evidently arrived at the notion of a Supreme God without any effort. This grand acquisition was not in their case the effect of progress and philosophical reflection; it was one of their first perceptions. Having soon separated his personality from the universe, they almost immediately

arrived at the third term—God, creator of the universe. Instead of a Nature animated and vivid in all its parts, they conceived, if I may dare to say so, a Nature dry and without fecundity. There is a considerable difference between this rigid and simple conception of a God isolated from the world with a world moulded like a vase in the hands of a potter, and the Indo-European theogony, animating and deifying Nature, taking life as a struggle, the universe as a perpetual changing, and importing in some degree into the divine dynasties, revolution and progress.

The intolerance of the Semitic people is the necessary consequence of their monotheism. The Indo-European people, before their conversion to Semitic ideas (Jews, Christians, or Mussulmans), never having taken their religion as absolute truth, but as a sort of family or caste heritage, remained strangers to intolerance and proselytism. This is why we find among these people only, liberty of thought, the spirit of criticism and individual research. The Semites, on the contrary, seeking to realise a worship independent of province and country, condemned all religions differing from their own. Intolerance is really in this sense an attribute of the Semitic race, and a part of the legacy, good or bad, which they have left to the world. The extraordinary phenomenon of the Mussulman conquest was only possible among a race incapable, like them, of appreciating diversity, and to whom the entire symbol was included in a word: God is God. Certainly Indo-European tolerance exhibits a more elevated idea of human destiny and grander liberality of soul; but who will dare to say that in revealing the divine unity and in definitively suppressing local religions, the Semitic race has not laid the foundation-stone of the unity and progress of humanity?

We can understand now, how this race, so eminently endowed for creating and propagating religions, should



not have passed mediocrity in all heathen courses. A race incomplete from its very simplicity, it had neither plastic art, nor rational science, nor philosophy, nor political life, nor military organisation. The Semitic race has never comprehended civilisation in the sense which we attach to the word; we do not find in her midst either great organised empires or public spirit, nothing which recalls the Greek city, nothing either which recalls the absolute monarchy of Egypt or of Persia. Questions of aristocracy, democracy, and feudalism, which include the whole secret of the history of the Indo-European peoples, have no meaning for the Semitic race. The Semitic nobility was wholly patriarchal: they did not hold by conquest—the source of it was in their blood. The Jew, like the Arab, rigorously insisted that the only supreme power was in God. The military inferiority of the Semites arose from their utter incapacity for discipline and organisation. In order to create armies they were obliged to have recourse to mercenaries: David employed Phœnicians and Carthaginians, the Khalifs too did so. The Mussulman conquest was itself accomplished without organisation and without tactics. The Khalif was nothing of a sovereign nor of a military chief—he was a vice-prophet. The most illustrious representative of the Semitic race in our days, Abdel-Kader, is a learned man, a man of religious meditation and strong passions, but not a soldier. History does not afford us any great empire founded by a Semitic people. Judaism, Christianity, Islamism, these are their work—work always directed towards the same end: to simplify the human mind, to banish polytheism, to write at the top of the Book of Revelations this word, which has rendered to human thought the great service of effacing the mythological and cosmogonic complications in which profane antiquity lost itself: “At the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

## II.

It is about two thousand years before our era when the regard of the historian rests with some certitude on this predestined family. An emigration of Semitic nomads, with whom the name of Thare or Terah was connected, quitted the mountains of Armenia and went towards the south. We may suppose that there had been for a long time in the mountains of the north, a focus of monotheistic aristocracy, which remained faithful to their patriarchal customs and their elevated worship. Even in departing from this sanctuary the emigrant tribes considered themselves as bound to God by an alliance and special bargain; it is thus we see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continuing in Canaan and in Egypt their noble avocation of shepherd—rich, proud chiefs of a numerous household, in possession of pure and simple religious ideas, and coming across the various civilisations without fusion, and without receiving anything from them.

Abraham, a personage definitively historic and real, conducts the emigration into Palestine. He was not, however, the first of his race, for, independently of the Canaanites, we find a chief, Semitic and monotheistic like him, Melchisedec, with whom he makes friends. However, Mesopotamia remained for a long time the centre of the Terah family, and it was from thence that the aristocracy, faithful to Semitic ideas in respect of purity of blood, sent up to the time of their going into Egypt, to seek for wives for their sons.

The life of Israel at this epoch was that of an Arab *douar*, with its prodigious development of individuality and poetry, but otherwise with its absolute want of political ideas, and of scarcely defined intellectual culture.



We hardly know what was the result of the first contact of the Israelite tribe with Egypt and the Canaanites. The strong antipathy displayed throughout Hebraic history against Canaan affords no reason for thinking that no influence could have been exercised by Canaan upon Israel. The part taken by the Hebrews in not recognising the Canaanites as brethren, does it not indicate the desire to put the Canaanites from out of the chosen race of Shem in order to class them among the infidel family of Ham, contrary to the evident testimony of the language? <sup>1</sup> The fraternal hatreds have never been stronger than among the Jewish race, the most contemptuous and the most aristocratic of all. Without admitting, with some learned men, that the Hebrews and the Canaanites had for a long time a religion nearly identical, we ought to recognise that it is only from a relatively modern epoch that the former attained that spirit of exclusion which characterises the Mosaic institutions. Several data of the Phœnician religion are to be found in the ancient Hebrew worship. In the patriarchal epoch we see the descendants of Abraham accept as sacred the places and objects which the Canaanites received as such—trees, mountains, sources, betyles or beth-el.<sup>2</sup>

Impenetrable darkness covers the first religious movement of Israel, that of which Moses was the hierophant and the hero. It would be as contrary to sound criticism to relegate to these remote times the complicated organisation we find described in the Pentateuch—an organisation of which we do not find a trace in the epoch of the Judges, or even in the time of David and Solomon—as it would be rash to deny that Israel in going out of Egypt had undergone the operation of a grand religious organiser.

<sup>1</sup> The Phœnician language was nearly pure Hebrew.

<sup>2</sup> This name denotes sacred stones to which they attributed divine virtues.

The descendants of Abraham seem to have preserved in Egypt all the originality of their Semitic genius. In constant communication with the other Terachite tribes of Arabia Petrea, they conceived, under the influence of a lively antipathy to Egyptian idolatry, one of those monotheistic reactions so familiar to Semitic people, and generally so fruitful. Every religion naturally avoids its cradle. The movement we speak of, which appears to have had its focus in the tribe of Levi, was followed by a sort of Flight (*Hegira*) or emigration, and an heroic epoch which in the imagination of more modern times has assumed the proportions of an epic. Sinai, the holy mountain of all the country, was where the first act took place; that was the point at which the revelation was made. A sacred name of the Divinity, including the most elevated notion of monotheism, two tablets upon which were inscribed ten precepts of the better kind of morality, some aphorisms, which formed with the ten precepts the law of Jehovah, some simple ceremonies suitable to the life of a nomadic people, such as the ark, the tabernacle, the passover, were probably the essential elements of this first institution, which afterwards became complicated at the same time as the part of the founder grew greater. M. Ewald<sup>1</sup> proves in a most ingenious manner that the glory of Moses underwent in Israel a long eclipse; that his name was almost unknown under the Judges and during the first ages of the Kings, and that the old founder did not come out of his tomb with the extraordinary *éclat* which surrounds him until one or two ages before the fall of the kingdom of Judah.

During the whole of the epoch of the Judges, and before monarchy was established, Israel presented the spectacle of Arab life in all its perfection: tribes without any other obligation than the remembrance of their brotherhood and

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II. p. 44 and following.



the hegemony (leadership) of one among them; the most simple religion that had ever existed; a poetry vivid, youthful, abrupt, of which the echo has come down to us in the wild and admirable song of Deborah; no institution but that of a temporary chief (judge when required), and the power, still less definite, of the prophet or seer, supposed to be in communication with the Deity; lastly, the priest, regarded as the exclusive right of the tribe of Levi, to such a point that those individuals who suffered themselves to relapse into idolatry believed themselves bound to engage a Levite for the service of their idol. Nothing as yet designates Israel as a predestined people: there were some people quite as advanced among the neighbouring tribes of Palestine, and the curious episode of Balaam proves to us that prophetism, religion, and poetry had among these tribes the same organisation as in Israel.

It is towards the time of Eli and Samuel (about a thousand years before the Christian era) that the seal of divine election is stamped all at once upon Israel. This was the moment when the Israelite nation arrived at reflection, and passed from the tribal state, poor, simple, and ignorant of the idea of majesty, to the state of a kingdom with a constituted power, aspiring to become hereditary. Up till then Israel had lived in a state of patriarchal anarchy, excluding all regular government, and tempered only by the solidarity of the members of the family, which is the customary state of the Arab tribes. Such a state of things became impossible in the face of the development which occurred in social life in the East; the people, with loud cries, demanded a king, as other nations had. All this shows us that this revolution was in imitation of the stranger, perhaps the Philistines or the Phœnicians, contrary to the wishes of the party conservative of traditions, to whom it appeared as a

kind of infidelity towards Jehovah. The narrative<sup>1</sup> which has come down to us is evidently the work of one in opposition; royalty is there represented under an evil aspect, and placed very inferior to the ancient patriarchal form. It is not impossible but that this narrative may have been from the very hand of Samuel; the chapters of the book which bears his name, where his political part is displayed, have a character so personal that we are tempted to believe that he himself was the author. This much is certain, that Samuel, withdrawing with one hand what he had given with the other, never departed from a system of fretfulness against the royalty which he had inaugurated with repugnance, to give in to the exacting demands of the mob. Royalty, inexperienced, and not having any tradition, was at first his plaything. At last the man destined to sum up so many of the contrary needs, and to form the nucleus of the history of the Hebrew people by the reunion in his person of the priest, the prophet, and the king, David, appeared, and became the representative of the poetical, religious, intellectual, and political ideal of Israel.

At first sight some odd contrasts strike him who attempts to describe the character of David according to the purified ideas of morality which we entertain. How was the man whom we find by turns agitated during the different epochs of his career, serving the stranger against his own country, associating with robbers, soiled with domestic crimes, cruel and vindictive even to atrocity, able to pass in the traditions of Israel as a king according to the heart of God, and as indeed an admirable political and religious organiser, the author of those psalms where the most delicate feelings of the heart are so finely expressed? How can the manners of a *condottiere* be combined with true greatness of soul, the most exquisite piety,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Samuel viii.



and the most sentimental poetry? How the man who sacrificed to a capricious adultery his most faithful servant, could persuade himself with entire good faith that Jehovah was his special protector, obliged to make him succeed, and to avenge him of his enemies, as if God existed only for him? All these traits would be inexplicable if we did not refer them to the Semitic character, of which David is the accomplished type in its good as well as in its evil aspects. Essentially egotistic, the Semite knows hardly any duty except to himself. To pursue his vengeance, to recover what he believes to be his right, is in his eyes a sort of obligation. Religion with him is something quite apart from everyday morality. Hence these extraordinary characters of Biblical history who provoke so much objection, and for whom to apologise is as unnecessary as to disparage. Political acts of the least scrupulous description did not prevent Solomon from being recognised as the wisest of kings. The odd mixture of sincerity and falsehood, of religious exaltation and egotism, which strikes us in Mahomet, the facility which the Mussulmans admit that in many cases the Prophet obeyed his passions rather than his duty, can only be explained by the species of laxity which makes Orientals profoundly indifferent as to the choice of means when they are persuaded that the end to be attained is the will of God. Our disinterested method, or, if we may say so, abstract mode of judging matters, is to them unknown.

It would be contrary to fair criticism to discuss either with malevolence, like Bayle has done, and the fragment collector of Wolfenbüttel, or with buffoonery, as Voltaire has done, those acts of David's life which cannot be justified according to the rules of morality. His conduct towards Saul was equivocal enough. After the death of Saul the throne belonged to his son Ishbosheth; all the tribes, with the exception of Judah, were grouped around

him: treason and assassination soon relieved David from this rival. Thanks to priestly favour, and the strong military institutions which seem to have been borrowed from the Philistines, among whom he had made a long stay, perhaps also by means of the foreign soldiers<sup>1</sup> kept in pay, the new king realised his leading idea, the supremacy of the tribe of Judah, a strong royalty hereditary in his line, and having its centre at Jerusalem. This future capital of the religious world had up till then been a small fortified town; David made of it a city in which the houses were no longer detached. Before his death the old king had crushed all his enemies, realised all his projects, and could repeat with pride the war-song of his youthful days, which astonishes us by its proud and brutal energy:—

“Jehovah has said to my master: Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies a stool for thy feet.

“Jehovah shall extend over Sion the sceptre of thy power; he rules in the midst of thine enemies.

“Thy people have hastened to thy call in the brightness of the holy ornaments; the youth which surrounds thee is like a shower from the bosom of the dawn.

“Jehovah has sworn it, and he will not repent of it: thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

“The Lord is at thy right hand; in the day of his anger he crushes the kings.

“He shall reign over the nations; he will fill up with corpses; he will break heads to a vast extent.

“He will refresh himself on his road with the water of a torrent; from thence he shall lift up his head.”

<sup>1</sup> This at least is the explanation given to the name Cari (Carians?), and the Cherethites and Pelethites (Cretans and Philistines?), who formed the bodyguard of David. The Carians in the ancient world carried on the business of mercenaries, and the Philistines, according to one very probable hypothesis, came from Crete.



This profane royalty, contrary in many respects to the true destiny of Israel, continued during the whole reign of Solomon. The throne of David, according to the rules of strict heredity, belonged to Adonijah. Solomon obtained it, thanks to the preference of his father and to an intrigue of the harem directed by his mother, Bathsheba, who was always the favourite wife. The matter was decided by the *strong men* of David, a small body of veterans of the rudest kind, who had the nerve of the preceding reign. The will of David was preponderant, so well had Israel been accustomed to obey him. The wisest of kings began his reign, following the custom of the East, by slaughtering Adonijah and his party. If Adonijah had succeeded, he would doubtless have treated the party of Solomon in the same way. However that may be, these disturbances were attended with serious consequences to heredity, and gave a blow to legitimacy in Israel from which it never recovered.

If the idea of a conquering monarchy ever crossed the mind of David, accustomed to live with his warriors and the Philistines, it was an idea impossible of realisation, and was soon abandoned. The Hebrew people were incapable of a great military organisation, and indeed, under Solomon, all their great warlike preparations turn to peace. The reign of Solomon remains the profane ideal of Israel. His alliances with all the East, without regard to differences of religion, his superb seraglio, which comprehended some seven hundred queens and three hundred concubines, the order and beauty of the services of his palace, the industrial and commercial prosperity of his times, aroused in the imagination that taste for comfort and worldly enjoyment to which Israel has abandoned itself whenever the sting of suffering has not forced it towards a higher destiny.

The Song of Songs is the charming expression of the

joyous life of Israel, happy and delicately sensual during those moments, allowing divine thoughts to slumber, it gave itself up to pleasure. A profane literature, partly common to the neighbouring people of Palestine, took the upper hand of the lyric poetry of the psalmists and the seers. Solomon himself cultivated this worldly wisdom, almost foreign to the worship of Jehovah, and which is not likely to prosper here. Some works are attributed to him, and it is certain that he wrote. Less of a poet than his father, and not being gifted like him with the true sentiment of the vocation of Israel, he set himself to describe creatures from the cedar to the hyssop;<sup>1</sup> then, if we are to believe the legend, he fell into a state of scepticism, disgusted with everything, and took refuge in hopeless wisdom. "Vanity of vanities; nothing is new under the sun; increase of knowledge is increase of trouble. I have desired to search out that which passes under the heavens, and I have seen nothing but vexation of spirit."

We feel how far we are from the pure ideal of Israel. The vocation of Israel was neither philosophy, nor science, nor art (music excepted), nor industry, nor commerce. In opening these profane ways, Solomon did in some sense cause his people to deviate from their wholly religious destiny. It was the act of the true God if similar tendencies had prevailed. Christianity and the conversion of the world to monotheism being the essential work of Israel, to which the remainder ought to be brought back, everything which has interrupted that superior aim has

<sup>1</sup> M. Ewald understands by this expression a cosmography like that of the Arab naturalist Kazwini, or a description of all creatures, commencing with the largest and ending with the smallest. I prefer to think that he descanted on the moral to be drawn from animals and plants, analogous to those we read of in Proverbs xxx., or to those of *Physiologus* and the *Bestiair* which were so popular in the Middle Ages. The idea of a science descriptive of nature was foreign to the Semitic people until they came in contact with the Greek spirit.



been only a frivolous and dangerous distraction in its history. But so far from having advanced the great work, Solomon has done everything to compromise it. If he had succeeded, Israel would have ceased to be the people of God, and would have become a worldly nation like Tyre and Sidon. The prophets had but little influence under him. Carried away by his relations with the most diverse people and by his desire to please his Egyptian, Sidonian, and Moabitish women, he adopted a kind of tolerance for foreign worship. While the successor of David was passing his time in putting conundrums to the infidel Queen of Sheba, altars to Moloch and Astarte might be seen on the Mount of Olives. What could be more contrary to the first duty of Israel? Guardian of an idea to which the world ought to rally, charged with the substitution in the conscience of man of the worship of the Supreme God for that of the national divinities, Israel should have been intolerant, and have boldly affirmed that all worships save that of Jehovah were false and worthless. The reign of Solomon was thus in many respects an interval in the sacred career of Israel. The intellectual and commercial development which he had inaugurated was followed by nothing. Towards the end of his life the prophets, whom he had reduced to silence, regained the upper hand and began an active opposition. His works, considered profane, have been mostly lost. His memory remains doubtful, and the breadth of ideas which he had inaugurated have left in Israel but a vague and brilliant memory.

We see here the great law of all the history of the Hebrew people manifesting itself, the contest of two opposing needs, which seems to have always carried this intelligent and passionate race with it in a contrary sense: on the one part, the breadth of mind aspiring to comprehend the world, to imitate other people, to leave the

narrow surroundings in which the Mosaic institutions had enclosed Israel; on the other, the conservative thought to which the salvation of humanity was attached. The prophets are the representatives of the exclusive tendency; the kings, of a thought more open to ideas from the outer world. Prophetism, better adapted to the genius and the vocation of the Hebrew people, ought necessarily to triumph and prevent the lay royalty from ever taking permanent root in Israel.

That which is important to remark is that the prophetic authority, so hostile to royalty, was hardly less so to the priesthood. The prophet<sup>1</sup> did not come out of the tribe of Levi; he did not teach in the Temple, but in the market-places, the streets, and the squares. Far from enlarging upon observances, according to the custom of the priests, they preached pure worship, indifference to exterior practices when they were not combined with adoration of heart. The prophet held his commission from God alone, and represented the popular interest as against the king and the priests, often allied with the king. From thence arose a power which has no analogy in the history of any other people, a sort of inspired tribunal devoted to the conservation of ancient ideas and ancient rights.

We cannot deny that the general policy of the prophets does not present itself to us as being narrow or opposed to progress; but this was the true policy of Israel. It appears troublesome at first, with voice austere and monotonous, always predicting ruin and anathematising those instincts which lead ancient man towards the worship of Nature. Often, in this long contest between the kings and the pro-

<sup>1</sup> We regret to be obliged to use the word "*prophet*," which is only given by the Greek translators of the Bible, and would lead to the belief that the prediction of the future was the essential function of these inspired men. It would be preferable, at least for these ancient epochs, to call them *seers*, or to preserve the Semitic name *Nabi*.



phets, it is the kings whom we are disposed to think right. The proposition of Samuel to Saul is generally without much reason, and if the prophets sometimes addressed David with very just warnings when they recalled that great king to morality, which he was too ready to forget, we cannot deny that oftentimes their reproaches exhibit a very simple policy; for example, when they presented as a capital crime the numbering of the people ordered by David, and sought to place before him the calamities which followed as a punishment for that doubtless unpopular measure. Many of the kings represented by the severe authors of the Book of Kings and of the Paralipomenes as wretches, were perhaps reasonable and tolerant princes, parties to necessary alliances with strangers, obeying the necessities of the times, and with a certain leaning towards luxury and industry.

The prophets, full of the old Semitic spirit, ardent foes of the plastic arts, furious iconoclasts, hostile to everything calculated to draw Israel into the movement of the world, demanded from the kings the persecution of all worships removed from monotheism, and denounced as crimes the sensible alliances which they had contracted outside. Never was opposition more bitter, more violent, more anarchical; and yet at the bottom the opposition was right. Thence we find this principle, that Israel had but one vocation—the conservation of monotheism; the direction of its movements rightly belonged to the prophets. Israel could only rally humanity round the same faith by scrupulously separating itself first from all foreign influence. The conservation of monotheism required neither breadth nor variety of mind, but only an inflexible tenacity.

## III.

David and Solomon represented during sixty years (about six centuries before the Christian era) the highest degree of glory and temporal prosperity the Hebrews have ever reached. From that time all their dreams of happiness turn towards an ideal composed of David and Solomon—towards a king powerful and peaceful, who shall reign from the one sea to the other, and to whom all kings shall be tributary. At what moment does this fruitful thought, out of which shall arise the Messiah, make its appearance in Israel? The critic should not say. These ideas, wrapped up in the depth of the conscience of a nation, have no beginning. Like all the profound works of Nature, they hide their origin in mysterious darkness. Was the idea of the dominion of the world born in Rome at a given moment? No; it was as ancient as Rome itself, and in some sort sealed up in the first stone of the Capitol. The faith in the Messiah, vague, obscure, intermingled with eclipses and neglect, slept all the same among the oldest associations of Israel.

The unfitness of the Hebrews for a great political part disclosed itself more and more. Starting from Rehoboam, they are always in a state of vassalage—at first under Egypt, then under Assyria, then under the Persians, then under the Greeks, and then under the Romans. One particular cause accelerated the ruin of their temporal power. The tribe of Judah, although they gained a preponderance by the victory of David, never succeeded in stifling the individuality of the other tribes so as to unite the nation. The tribes in the north of Palestine grouped around that of Ephraim aspired to a separation, and supported impatiently the state of religious dependence under which they were held by Jerusalem.



The great expenditure of Solomon, which weighed heavily on the provinces and only profited the capital, contributed to separate the interests of the North from the South. Ephraim with Mount Gerizim, the rival of Sion, the holy city of Bethel, the numerous memorials of the patriarchal age, was beyond contradiction the most considerable of the individualities which resisted the absorbing action of Judah. The rivalry of these two principal families of Israel dates from the remotest period of their history. In the time of the Judges, by the sojourn of the Ark at Shiloh, and by its territorial importance, Ephraim truly held the hegemony of the nation. The idea of a monarchy failed for a moment to be realised by Ephraim.<sup>1</sup> After the death of Saul, we find this tribe, grouping around it all the other tribes of the North, oppose without success Ishbosheth to David, the able and fortunate champion of the pretensions of Judah; and at last, after the death of Solomon, the separatist tendency triumphs by the division of the kingdom of Israel and the accession of an Ephraimite dynasty. Among the chiefs of the workmen whom Solomon employed in the construction of the rampart between Sion and Moriah, he noticed a robust young man of Ephraim, whose intelligent air struck him, and to whom he gave an important post under Government. This was the man destined to give a mortal blow to the house of David. Jeroboam during Solomon's lifetime raised the standard of revolt. The financial disorders which ensued on the death of the great king furnished an excellent opportunity for completing the separation which had become inevitable. We should not say that the schism of the ten tribes was, in view of the general destiny of the Hebrew people, a serious misfortune. Reduced to a space of twenty leagues long by fifteen broad, Judah, left to itself, became purified and

<sup>1</sup> See the narrative of the attempt of Abimelech (Judges ix.).

elevated—its religious ideas developed and became complicated. The North, on the contrary, delivered over to a brutal dynasty, became a prey to continual revolutions, and was soon disposed of—religious tradition became weak there. Harshly repulsed by the disdainful Jews of Jerusalem, when, after the Captivity, they volunteered their aid in rebuilding the Temple, the Samaritans could only copy at a distance the institutions of Judah. They took their revenge through Christianity. Christ found His most numerous disciples in the despised provinces (ill-fated as regards orthodoxy) of the ancient kingdom of the North, and in this sense we can fairly say that Samaria has had as much part in the work as Jerusalem, the capital of Israel. This old portion of the Hebrew people, which, if it has not had the brilliant destiny of Judah, has almost equalled it in perseverance and faith, is in our days on the eve of being extinguished, and affords to the world the singular spectacle of a religion about to die. Persecutions, misery, and the proselytism of more active sects—above all, Protestant missions—threaten every moment its frail existence. In 1820 the Samaritans numbered about five hundred. Robinson, who visited Nablous (the ancient Shechem) in 1838, did not find more than one hundred and fifty. In a petition which he addressed to the French Government in 1842, he states that they are reduced to forty families. Their old priest, Salamé, the son of Tobias, who corresponded with Bishop Gregory and M. De Sacy, is still alive;<sup>1</sup> but it does not appear that after him the knowledge of the language and Samaritan traditions is likely to continue. At the present day, when all the world is seeking in the East for some one to protect, no one thinks of these poor Samaritans.

<sup>1</sup> See the little work of M. l'Abbé Bargès, entitled *Les Samaritains de Naplous*. Paris, 1855.



It is further remarkable that prophetism in the kingdom of the North was at first an element of political disturbance still more serious than in the South, and rendered the law of succession almost impossible, whilst at Jerusalem the prestige of the House of David and the undisputed privilege of the Levites maintained a sort of right divine for the succession to the throne and the priesthood. Eli and his school represent to us the time when prophetism was all powerful, making and unmaking dynasties, governing in reality under the name of kings in tutelage. The finest pages of M. Ewald's book are those where he shows the character and part of Eli. This giant among the prophets, by his ascetic life, the peculiar dress he wore, his invisible retreat in the mountains, from whence he issued like a supernatural being in order to launch his denunciations and to disappear as suddenly, assumed the more simple appearance of the ancient prophets with that of the ascetic school of the literary. A great revolution was not indeed slow to operate in the form of prophetism. The prophets of the school of Eli and Elisha did not write : to the ancient prophet, the man of action, succeeds the writing prophet, seeking his power in the beauty of his diction only. These wonderful publicists enriched the Hebrew Scriptures, heretofore limited to historical narrative, with canticles and parables of a novel kind ; theirs was a sort of political literature, maintained by the events of the day, and to which the press and the tribune of modern times can alone be compared.

As the profane future of Israel seemed destroyed beyond hope of recovery, so the religious destiny became greater. The last days of the kingdom of Judah present one of the most wonderful religious movements in history. The first origin of Christianity is there. The ancient Hebrew religion, simple, severe, and without refined theology, is hardly anything but a negation. Towards the time of

which we speak, an exalted pietism, which led to the reforms of Hezekiah, and, above all, of Josiah, introduced new elements into Mosaism. Worship was centralised more and more at Jerusalem, prayers commenced. The word of devotion, which does not correspond to anything in ancient patriarchal religion, began to have a sense. New editions of the Mosaic code, conceived in a prophetic tone, and for which authority was obtained by certain pious artifices, were circulated;<sup>1</sup> certain canticles, composed by literary men and impressed with some measure of rhetoric, excited a zeal for Mosaism in the minds of the people.

A loose style, prolix, but full of unction, of which we find a type in the works of Jeremiah, characterises these productions. It is not necessary to add that every fresh outbreak of piety was accompanied by a fresh outbreak of intolerance and persecution against all who did not conform to the purest monotheism.

A profound modification in the manner of feeling manifested itself at the same time—a spirit of mildness, a delicate sentiment of compassion for the weak, sympathy with the poor and the oppressed, with shades of character unknown in former times, appeared on all sides. The prophecies of Jeremiah and the Deuteronomy are already recognised as Christian books. Love, charity, is born in the world. At the same time the cherished idea of Israel increases in strength, the expectation of a model king who will reign as God in Jerusalem and realise the ancient oracles. They believed that this perfect king was about to come; but when they saw Josiah almost realise the idea of a theocratic sovereign and then perish miserably, the hope gave way. The very simple system upon which the social edifice of Israel rests, the compact between God and the nation, by virtue of which, so long as the nation

<sup>1</sup> V. Book of Kings (IV. according to the Vulgate), chaps. xxii., xxiii.



continued faithful to Jehovah, it should be happy and triumphant, this system, I say, could not fail of being attended with the severest disappointment. The prophets, who were charged with the application of this strange principle, must have had more than one struggle to maintain against the reality. Oftentimes those epochs were the most unfortunate when piety was most lively, and we can say that the final catastrophe overtook Israel in the midst of a period of great fervour. Inured to deception, accustomed to hope against hope, Israel appealed from the letter to the spirit. The idea of a spiritual kingdom of God, and of a law written not upon stone, but in the heart, appeared to them like the dawn of a new future.

Whilst the heart of Jerusalem was stirred with these delicate questions, on which depended the religious future of the world, immense and very powerful empires were being established in the East, to whom the destruction of Jerusalem hardly cost an effort. The Hebrews, with their ideas so simple on the subject of political and military organisation, showed a lively expression of surprise and fear when they found themselves for the first time in the presence of this formidable organisation of force, of impious and brutal materialism, of this despotism where the king usurped the place of God. The prophets, blind according to the flesh, clear-sighted according to the spirit, never ceased to reject the only policy which could save Israel, to batter the wall in order to attack royalty and to excite internal dissension by their threats and their puritanism.<sup>1</sup> We see them on the ruins of Jerusalem maintain their obstinacy, and almost triumph in the disasters which fulfilled their predictions. An ordinary policy would condemn them and make them mainly responsible for the misfortunes of their country; but the religious rôle of the Jewish people must always be fatal to their political rôle.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Jeremiah xxxvi.

Israel must undergo the fate of people devoted to one idea, and parade its martyrs before the scorn of the world, whilst waiting for the rallied world to ask as a suppliant for a place in Jerusalem.

## IV.

The Captivity only affected a small number of the inhabitants of Palestine, but it struck the head of the nation, and the whole class with whom religious tradition rested, in such a way that the whole spirit of Judea found itself transported to Babylonia. Such was the cause which brought to light, on the banks of the Euphrates, the most beautiful productions of Hebrew genius; those psalms so touching, which enchant and penetrate the soul with sadness and hope; those incomparable prophetic odes which are added at the end of the works of Isaiah.<sup>1</sup> They dwelt outside Babylon, or rather in the little villages grouped round the great city, like a second capital of Judaism. The restorers of the institutions and of the ancient studies of Judea, like Esdras and Nehemiah, came from thence, and were surprised, on their arrival, at the ignorance and corruption of language they found among their co-religionists of Palestine. After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, Babylon again became the principal centre of the intellectual culture of Israel, so that we may say that the continuation of Jewish tradition was twice made through that city, following the two great catastrophes which, at a distance of seven centuries, entirely ruined Judaism at Jerusalem. I do not know whether there is, in the history of the human mind, a spectacle more strange than that of which Babylon was the witness in the sixth century before the Christian era—

<sup>1</sup> Chaps. xl.-lxvi. The strongest proofs have established that these fragments are not by Isaiah, but of the time of the Captivity.



that little group of exiles, lost in the midst of a profane crowd, feeling at the same time their material weakness and their intellectual superiority, and seeing around them the brutal reign of force and pride exalt itself and reach heaven. From so many divine oracles not yet fulfilled, from that mass of deceived hopes, from that struggle of faith and imagination against reality, the Messiah was definitively born. In the presence of triumphant iniquity Israel appealed to the great day of Jehovah, and rushed resolutely into the future.

Where did the nameless prophet<sup>1</sup> live who was at this decisive moment the interpreter of the mind of Israel? The dreams of the sick man, who, suffering from the delirium of fever, sees spread before him another world and another sun shining, never had a like ardour. We can only point out the motive of these divine hymns by which the illustrious nameless one saluted the New Jerusalem. "Raise thyself, radiant with light, Jerusalem! A voice which cries in the desert: 'Prepare the ways of Jehovah, make smooth the paths!' They are beautiful upon the mountains, the feet of him who announces salvation. Heavens, spread your dew, that the clouds may shed justice. What is he who comes from Edom, who comes from Bozrah with clothes red with blood?" Then, in an obscure and mysterious vision, that sublime apotheosis of the man of grief, the first hymn to suffering the world had understood. The special gift of Israel—faith—the consciousness of his superiority surviving all his faults, the certainty of the future, which gave to a handful of captives the assurance that the world would some day belong to them, never shone more brilliantly than in the inspired pages of which we speak. "Raise thine eyes and look around, Jerusalem, at the crowds who come and gather themselves together. Sons are brought to thee from far countries, and daughters

<sup>1</sup> He whose works have been placed after the collection of Isaiah.

press upon thy bosom. A multitude of camels, the dromedaries of Midian and of Ephah, overflow thee; those who come from Sheba, carrying gold and silver, and announcing the praises of Jehovah. The flocks of Kedar run towards thee; the rams of Nabioth offer themselves for thy sacrifices. Who are those who fly like the clouds, like doves to their shelter? The isles of the sea are in hope; the vessels of Tarshish are ready to bring sons to thee. Strangers offer themselves to build thy walls; kings become thy servants. Thy gates will be open night and day to allow the elect of the nations to enter, and the kings brought to do thee homage. The sons of those who have humiliated thee come bending before thee: those who despised thee shall kiss the ground of thy feet; they shall call thee the City of God, the Holy Zion of Israel. Thou shalt suck the milk of nations; thou shalt suckle at the breast of kings. No one shall hear speak of wickedness on the earth nor of disasters within thy frontiers: peace shall reign upon thy walls; glory shall sit at thy gates. Thou shalt not need the sun to brighten thy days nor the moon to illumine thy nights: thy sun shall never set and thy moon shall no more decline; for Jehovah shall be thy light eternal, and the days of thy mourning shall pass away for ever." From this moment Israel appears to us to be exclusively possessed of the religious idea. Any of the profane distractions by which it had been occasionally hindered from henceforth troubled it no more. Above doubt, above revolt, above the temptation to idolatry, Paganism inspired nothing more than the bitter and haughty derision of the Book of Wisdom. Judaism went on restraining and strengthening itself more and more. Liberty, the simplicity of the ancient Hebrew genius, so foreign to all scruples of theology and casuistry, gave place to the pettiness of Rabbiniism. The scribe succeeded the prophet. A priesthood strongly organised



stifled all profane life: the Synagogue became what later on will be the Church, a sort of constituted authority, against which all independent thought is broken. Pietism became developed and produced a literature, very weak if we compare it with the productions of the classical epoch, but still full of charm: some touching and tender psalms, eternal food for pious souls, and the pretty romances of Tobit and Judith are of this period. We compare honest Tobit with Job, struck like him with undeserved misfortune: a world separates them. Here patience, virtue rewarded, sweet and consoling imagery; there revolt, obstinacy, dispute, and the proud feeling of the Arab saying in his misfortune, "God is great!" a sentiment which has nothing in common with the entirely Christian virtue of resignation.

A thorough indifference to political life was the consequence of the narrow and severe zeal which characterised the time at which we have now arrived. Israel was not charged with the duty of teaching liberty to the world; thus we see that since the Captivity they willingly accommodated themselves to the subordinate position, and availed themselves of the advantages offered by the situation without appearing to consider that there was anything shameful in it. Whilst Greece, with resources but little superior to those of Palestine, gained her liberty by her first victory, Israel resigned itself to be only a province of the great King, and found it well enough. That is, we must confess, the bad side of Jewish history. Being only jealous for their religious liberty, the Jews submitted without much trouble to those powers who showed their worship some tolerance, and furnished to all the despoticisms servants the more devoted because they were under no responsibility towards the nation. The Chaldean empire, it is true, was hateful to them, and they hailed its ruin with cries of joy, because, doubtless, that military and wholly

profane empire had nothing which responded to their own nature. They accepted, on the contrary, as a benefit, the domination of the Persians, whose religion was the least Pagan of the Pagan world, and afforded by its gravity, its leaning towards monotheism, its horror for sculptured figures, much analogy with Mosaic worship. Cyrus was received by them as an envoy of Jehovah, and introduced as of right into the elect family of the people of God.

We cannot deny that the Persians evinced considerable liberality towards Israel. Zorobabel, whom they established at the head of the nation, was of the house of David, and he was held out to the Jews to raise up through him their national dynasty; but such was their political lukewarmness, that after Zorobabel they allowed the line to continue in obscurity, and recognised no other power than that of the high priest, which became hereditary. Israel followed its destiny more and more; its history was no more that of a state, but of a religion. Such is the fate of those people who have to fill a mission, intellectual or religious, for other people, to pay for this brilliant and dangerous vocation with their own nationality. The Greek genius only acted powerfully upon the world for an age which had only a political *rôle*. It has been well shown that the first cause of the loss of Italy has been the universal tendency of Italy: the supremacy which, in effect, she had exercised for so long, has had this effect, that wishing to be mistress everywhere, she has had nothing at home. Who knows if some day French ideas will not fill the world when France shall be no more? Nationalities which hold strongly to their own soil, which do not seek to make their ideas prevail outside, are among themselves very tenacious, but they have little share in the general movement of the world. In order to act in the world we must die to ourselves: people who become missionaries of a religious thought have no other country than that



thought, and it is in this sense that too much religion kills a people and thwarts a purely national establishment. The Maccabees are admirable heroes, but their heroism does not excite in us the same impressions as Greek and Roman patriotism. Miltiades fights for Athens without any after-thought of theology or of belief. Judas Maccabeus fights for a faith and not for a country, or at least for his country subordinated to faith. This is so true, that since the Captivity the soil of Palestine has become almost indifferent to the Jews. Their most flourishing, most enlightened, and most pious communities are spread in regions far distant from the East.

A last trial, however, awaited Israel, and perhaps the most dangerous of all. I allude to the contact with Greek civilisation, which, starting from Alexandria, spread over all Asia. The first duty of the Jewish people was isolation. This duty they had been able to fulfil without too much trouble as regards Egypt, Phœnicia, and Assyria. Persia had exercised a sufficiently strong influence upon their imagination; but, thanks to a singular analogy of institutions and genius, this influence, freely adopted, was not an infidelity. The temptation was much more serious before the incomparable fascination which the most noble part of the human race had to undergo from the influence of the Greek spirit. Israel at first was profoundly affected. The Jewish colonists in Egypt allowed themselves to be taken with the seductions of Hellenism; they broke the communion with Jerusalem, and almost entirely went out of the Israelitish family.<sup>1</sup>

Palestine itself at first suffered from the action of the Seleucides. A stadium and gymnasia were to be seen at Jerusalem. One powerful party, which included almost all

<sup>1</sup> It is remarkable that Philo and the Jews of Egypt have not left any trace in the vast dépôt of doctrines which compose the Talmud. At the present day the true Jews hardly regard them as co-religionists.

the youth, favoured these novelties, and, fascinated by the splendours of the Greek institutions, held the worship and austere customs of their ancestors already in contempt. But this time again the conservative spirit prevailed. Some obstinate old men and a family of heroes saved the tradition around which the world was soon about to rally.

The measure of danger may be estimated by the degree of hatred. Woe to those who try to oppose themselves to the free development of the religious needs of humanity. The most neglected historical memoirs are those of sovereigns who, not having been able to foresee the future, or having foolishly endeavoured to stay the course of events, have become the persecutors of religious movements which were bound to succeed. Such were Antiochus, Herod, Diocletian, Julian, all great princes on the earth, whom the popular conscience has damned without pity. Antiochus Epiphanes, whose name is invariably associated with that of Nero, was a humane, enlightened prince,<sup>1</sup> who undoubtedly desired the progress of civilisation and the arts of Greece. The rude means which he employed were those which the Greeks and Romans put into practice in order to bend to their purposes civilisations different from their own. After having remained for a long time as a hostage in Rome, Antiochus returned to Syria with his head full of ideas of Roman policy, and dreaming of an Eastern empire, founded, like that of Rome, upon the assimilation of nationalities and the extinction of provincial varieties. Judea was the first obstacle he had to encounter in the execution of this project. The priesthood was at that time very weak; the high priest, Jesus, who, to follow the fashion, called himself Jason, forgot himself so far as to send a *theoria* or deputation to the Herculean games at Tyre; the Temple was pillaged; at one time the Olympian Jupiter had his altar, and bacchanalians ran

<sup>1</sup> See the evidence of the same Book of Maccabees, I. vi. 11.



through the streets of Jerusalem. Then began that heroic resistance which has given to religion its first martyrs. The priests and a great part of the population of Jerusalem had given way, but it was the privilege and the secret of the strength of the Jewish people to maintain their faith independently of the priest, by keeping it in the conscience of a small number of heads of families attached to very simple ideas and governed by an invincible feeling of their own superiority. The destiny of humanity was risked then on the firmness of a few families. In consequence of this firmness the Greek spirit was reduced to impotence in Palestine, and deprived of all truly productive co-operation at the first budding of Christianity.

An influence much more efficacious, because it was exercised without violence and by the effects of the moral conformity of the two people, was that of Persia. Persia is the only country which has exercised over the Jewish people a really profound religious action. One of the most important results of Oriental studies in these latter days has been to show the capital part which the institutions of the Avesta have played in all Western Asia during the ages which preceded and those which immediately followed the Christian era. It is to Persia we must give the honour of so many of the new elements which we find in Christianity compared with Mosaism—elements which a superficial examination had at first attributed to Greece. Babylon, which continued to be one of the principal centres of Judaism, was the theatre of this commingling, which led to such serious results in the history of the human spirit, and of which the first consequences were for the Jews a most complicated theory of angels and demons, a refined spiritualism, if we compare it with the ancient Hebrew realism, a taste for symbols, confined to the Cabala, and gnosticism, ideas upon the terrestrial manifestations of the Deity, quite foreign to a Semitic people. The

belief in immortality and the resurrection of the body takes also more decided forms. The Hebrews had never, on this point, reached anything very decided. The immortality in which Israel has believed more than any other people was that of their race and their work, not that of the individual. At last these Messianic formulas assumed a form of much greater precision, and became connected with the belief that the end of the world was at hand, and would be accompanied by a renewal of everything.<sup>1</sup> A series of compositions written under the form of apocalyptic visions, which M. Ewald rightly considers as a sort of revival of prophetism, such as the Books of Daniel, Enoch, the fourth Book of Esdras, and the Sibylline verses,<sup>2</sup> were the product of this new taste, which, if we compare it with the style of the poets of the good epoch, represents a sort of romanticism. If we only look upon the form, these are the productions of a thorough decadence. However, we sometimes meet with a singular vigour of thought. The Book of Daniel, in particular, may be considered as the most ancient essay upon the philosophy of history. The revolutions which passed over the East, the cosmopolitan habits of the Jewish people, and the intuition which that people have always had with regard to the future, gave them, under the circumstances, an immense advantage over Greece. Whilst political history—I should say, the history of the internal strife of the city—has found in Greece and in Italy its most excellent interpreters, Israel has had the glory of being the first to look upon humanity as a

<sup>1</sup> See an excellent work upon the origin and formation of these apocalyptic beliefs among the Jews, recently published in the *Revue de Théologie* of M. Colani (October 1855) by M. Michel Nicolas, Professor of the Theological Faculty of Montauban. The demonstration of that which is indicated here will there be found.

<sup>2</sup> No doubt is possible with regard to the relatively modern date of the Book of Daniel. See the special works of M. Lengerke, Hitzig, Lücke, Ewald. Part of the Sibylline verses is of Jewish origin.



whole, to see in the sequence of empires something more than a fortuitous succession, and reduce to a formula the development of human affairs. Incomplete though it may be, this system of philosophy of history is at least that which has existed longest; it has lasted since the epoch of the Maccabees until almost to our day. St. Augustine in the *Cité de Dieu* and Bossuet in the *Histoire Universelle* have found nothing essential to add to it.

A new fact in Israel heralded the productive age which preceded the birth of Christ: numerous sects arose, introducing a subtilty of theological pretensions unknown until then. At the same time the practices of particular devotion, towards which the ancient Hebrews were never much attracted, spread, and, following the eternal law of religions, whilst developing the accessory, obliterated the original foundation. The synagogues or places of religious meetings, of which we find no trace before the Captivity, and of which the institution is but slightly in harmony with the spirit of Mosaism, became of great importance and multiplied everywhere. The influence of Higher Asia made itself felt more and more; but whilst opened on the Eastern side, Jerusalem remained closed on the side of Greece, and obstinately declined all intercourse with Western philosophy. A few enlightened men, too reasonable to succeed, the Sadducees, tried to constitute a sort of rational Mosaism. The unbelieving Herod caused the Temple to be rebuilt in the Greek style, and opposed to the fanatics a wholly worldly policy, based on the separation of Church and State and upon equal toleration of all the different sects. These timid remedies availed nothing against the mysterious evil which afflicted Israel. The Pharisees objected, but who were the Pharisees? The continuators of the true tradition, the sons of those who resisted during the Captivity, who resisted, under the Maccabees, the ancestors of the Talmudists, and those who mounted on

the pyres of the Middle Ages, the natural enemies of all those who aspired to make Abraham's bosom wider and more inclusive.

Thus the grand law which governs the history of Israel was maintained to the end, the struggle between the liberal tendency and the conservative tendency—a struggle in which, for the happiness of the world, the conservative thought has always been uppermost. He who studies this history according to our modern ideas, reflected by the ideas of Greece and Rome, is scandalised at each step: he would be for Saul against Samuel, for Ishbosheth against David, for the kings against the prophets, for the Samaritans against the Jews, for the Hellenist party against the Maccabees, for the Sadducees against the Pharisees. However, if Saul and Ishbosheth had succeeded, Israel would have been nothing but a petty state, forgotten in the East, something like Moab and Idumea. If the kings had succeeded in stifling the prophets, perhaps Israel might have equalled in the order of profane things the prosperity of Tyre or of Sidon, but all the religious part would have been suppressed. If the Maccabees had not been found to resist the Seleucidæ, Judea would have become a country like Bithynia or Cappadocia, absorbed first by Greece and then by Rome. It was, if we may say so, the obstinate Jews of Modin, with narrow and backward spirit, with minds closed to all idea of progress, devoid of feeling for art, and totally incapable of understanding the brilliant civilisation of Greece. We cannot deny that the Sadducees appear in many things to be superior to the Pharisees. The whole history of Israel proves, by a striking example, that victory here below does not belong to the causes which seem the most reasonable, the most liberal; it is to those whom Jehovah has chosen to guide humanity towards the unknown countries which the divine oracles have promised.



The moment was come when enlarged thought and narrow thought were to have their last struggle, and when the two contrary tendencies which had agitated Israel were about to end in being rent asunder. One part, indeed, the Jewish people, had a mission essentially conservative: the other boldly appropriated the future. The day when that future happened, it was easy to see that the synagogue would obey its eternal maxim: always to hope, always to resist. From that arises the false position of Israel in the presence of Christianity, and the origin of that irreconcilable hatred which eighteen centuries have scarcely satisfied. Christ came from out of its midst, and in order to be faithful to its principle Israel ought to have crucified Him. Christianity was its natural development, and it ought to have repulsed it. Driven from the lap of his mother, this son ought to have grown big and gone without her to the destiny which awaited him. St. Paul has expressed, with the energy of his passionate genius, this situation, the most extraordinary that the religious history of the world has ever presented.

Let us stay upon the threshold of this mysterious scene, in which the whole of the life of Israel is displayed in its entirety. Religions neither die nor abdicate, and Judaism, having produced its fruit, ought to continue its long and tenacious existence throughout the ages. Only the spirit of life is henceforth gone out of it: its history is beautiful and curious still, but it is the history of a sect; it is no longer specially the history of religion. What if, in ending, we put this question: Has Israel fulfilled its vocation? Has it maintained, amidst the great struggle of the people, the post originally assigned to it? Yes, we answer without hesitation. Israel has been the stock upon which the faith of human kind has been grafted. No people have taken their destiny seriously like Israel; none have felt so vividly their national joys

and griefs; none have lived so entirely for one idea. Israel has conquered time, and made use of all its oppressors. The day when, through false intelligence, the taking of Sebastopol was celebrated a year too soon, an old Polish Jew, who passed his days in the Imperial Library absorbed in reading the dusty manuscripts of his nation, accosted me, citing the passage from Isaiah, "She is fallen, she is fallen, Babylon!" The victory of the allies was in his eyes only the chastisement for the violence exercised towards his co-religionists by him whom he called the Nebuchadnezzar and the Antiochus of our times. I seem to see before me, in this sad old man, the living genius of this indestructible people: he has clapped his hands upon all the ruins; persecuted by all, he has been avenged on all. One simple thing only was needful to him, but that one thing which man does not give to himself—to last. It is from that he has realised the boldest dreams of his prophets. The world which despised him has come to him; Jerusalem, at the present hour, is truly "a house of prayer for all nations." Equally venerated by the Jew, the Christian, the Mussulman, she is the Holy City of four hundred millions of men, and the prophecy of Zachariah is fulfilled to the letter: "In that time then ten men shall attach themselves to the lappet of a Jew's coat, saying to him: We will go with you, for we have heard say that the Lord is with you!"



## THE CRITICAL HISTORIANS OF JESUS.

It is said that Angelico of Fiesole only painted the heads of the Virgin and of Christ when upon his knees: it would have been well if the critics had done the same, and modified the rays of certain figures before which the ages bow, after having adored them. The first duty of the philosopher is to unite the great band of humanity for the worship of goodness and moral beauty, as manifested in all noble characters and elevated symbols. The second is to search indefatigably for truth, with the firm conviction that if the sacrifice of our egotistical instincts can be agreeable to the Deity, it ought not to be so with regard to our scientific instincts. The timid credulity which, for fear of seeing the object of its faith vanish altogether, embodies every fancy, is as contrary to the harmony and sound discipline of the human faculties as the purely negative criticism which renounces the adoration of the ideal type because it has discovered that the ideal does not always conform to the actual. It is as well to understand that criticism, so far from excluding respect, and inferring, as timid people suppose it, a crime of divine and human treason, includes, on the contrary, acts of the purest worship. May be it fears to be taken as irreverent when it seeks to withdraw the veil from the true physiognomy of the sublime Master, who has said, "I am the truth."

An instinct so profound induces man to search for truth at the cost of his dearest beliefs. This instinct constitutes, with elevated natures, a duty so imperative that the

criticism of the origins of a religion is never the work of freethinkers, but of the most enlightened sectaries of that religion. The branch of Christianity which leans most essentially upon the Bible is precisely that which has created the rational interpretation of biblical texts. The boldest works upon the history of the founders of Christianity have come from Christian theologians. When lay science began to occupy itself with these difficult subjects, it had only to recapitulate, from its own point of view, the works undertaken by clerical erudition, and which theology alone, we must say, had formerly the liberty to undertake. If the independent thinker of our days just dares to touch on these sufficiently formidable problems, what in the past would have been the fate of the historian who, without any regard for the faith of eighteen centuries, should cite before his tribunal him whose face appears to us to be surrounded with the aureole of the Deity? It was not in the beginning that criticism could dream of such a bold enterprise. The day when it places its hand upon this last sanctuary, it has then concluded a long series of onslaughts against received opinions, and planted its flag upon a place the outworks of which it has already destroyed.

You should study, indeed, the march of modern criticism since the Renaissance. You will see it always following the line of its inflexible progress, replace one after another the superstitions of incomplete science with the true images of the past. Sorrow seems to attach itself to each of the steps it takes in that fatal path; but in reality there is not one of the gods dethroned by criticism who does not also receive from criticism more legitimate titles to adoration. It is at first the false Aristoteles of the Arabs and of the commentators, who falls under the blows of the Hellenists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and is made to give place to the authentic and original



Aristoteles; then it is Plato raised against the scholastic peripateticism preached at Florence as the Gospel, but finds its true title to glory in descending from the rank of a revelation to that of a philosopher; then it is Homer, the idol of ancient philology, who one fine day seems to have disappeared from his pedestal of three thousand years, and resumes his true beauty in becoming the impersonal expression of the genius of Greece; then it is primitive history, received until then with a coarse realism, which happens to be so much better understood when it is more strictly examined. A courageous march from the letter to the spirit, painful deciphering, which substitutes for the legend a reality a thousand times more beautiful, such is the law of modern criticism. Wolf has done more for the true glory of Homer than generations of blind admirers, and I have always regretted not to see him figuring in the fine picture of M. Ingres, among those to whom the Iliad and the Odyssey owe the better part of their immortality.

It was inevitable that criticism, in this passionate research into origins, should encounter that collection of works, the products, more or less pure, of the Hebrew genius, which, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, form, according to the point of view where we place them, either the most beautiful of sacred books or the most curious among literature. After so many admirable works undertaken for the information of antiquity—Greek, Latin, and even Oriental—how was it that no one dreamed of the Bible? How was it they refused to examine the most precious monument which remains to us of the most interesting of antiquities? To stay the human mind upon this descent would have been an impossible thing. Nevertheless, whilst orthodoxy was still the law of external life, and even of the greater part of conscience, there were believers who at first tried biblical criticism. Simple illusion!

which proves at least the good faith of those who undertook the work, and still more the fatality which carries away the human mind engaged in the paths of rationalism to a rupture, which at first it endeavoured to avoid, with tradition.

## I.

Criticism has two modes of attacking a marvellous story ; as to accepting it as such, it is not to be thought of, since its essence is the negation of the supernatural:<sup>1</sup> First, to admit the foundation of the story, but to explain, in taking count of the age and the persons who have transmitted it to us, and of the forms received at such and such epochs to express the facts ; secondly, to take the doubt upon the story itself, and consider its formation without according to it any historic value. On the first hypothesis, we adhere to it to explain the same as matters of history ; we assume, consequently the reality of the matter. On the second, without expressing any opinion on the reality, we analyse the apparition of the narrative like a simple psychological fact ; we regard it as a poem created entirely by tradition, not having, or not being capable of having, any other cause than the instincts of the spiritual nature of man. In Biblical exegesis we give to those who follow the first method the name of ration-

<sup>1</sup> An explanation has become necessary upon this word, since writers have adopted the habit of designating by the word *supernatural* the ideal and moral element of life, in opposition to the materialist and positive element. In this sense we could not deny the supernatural without falling into a coarse sensualism, which is as far as possible from my thought ; for I believe, on the contrary, that only intellectual and moral life has some value and full reality. I mean here by supernatural the *miracle*, a particular act of the Deity being introduced in a series of events of the physical and psychological world, and deranging the course of circumstances in the face of a special government of humanity.



alists,<sup>1</sup> because at first they only opposed the supernaturalists, and we reserve to the partisans of the second the name of mythologists.

The first mode of explanation, the employment of which could not fail to lead to views singularly narrow, was the only one known from antiquity. Evhemerus has left his name to the system which, in the interpretation of myths, substitutes natural facts for marvellous traditions. Protestant exegesis was at first pure evhemerism.<sup>2</sup> A man whose name does not occupy in the history of the human mind the place it deserves, Eichhorn, first applied this system of interpretation to the Bible. The progress of history and philosophy has brought about the alternative of admitting divine intervention among all people in the primitive age, or denying it among all. Among all the primitive people, he observes, that which was unexpected and not understood was attributed to the Deity; the learned always lived in communication with the superior beings. Outside Hebraic history no one is tempted to believe in the literal truth of similar narratives. But evidently, adds Eichhorn, reason requires that we should treat the Hebrews and the non-Hebrews after the same manner. In a manner, we ought to place all people during their infancy under the control of superior beings, or not to believe in a similar influence among any of them. To admit a primitive supernaturalism common to all nations is to create a world of fables. What is to be done, then,

<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to intimate that the name of rationalist is used here in a purely conventional sense, in order to designate those exegetes who first applied evhemeristic criticism to the Bible. The true rationalists, in our view, are neither the exegetes who were first called by that name, nor the mythologists, but those who applied, or will apply, to Jewish and Christian history a criticism free from all dogmatic bias.

<sup>2</sup> The history of these first essays has been thoroughly treated by Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, Introduction. See also *L'Introduction à l'Ancien et au Nouveau Testament* of M. l'Abbé Glaire, vol. i. p. 534 et seq.

is this: to consider the ancient narratives according to the spirit of the times which have left them to us. Without doubt, if they had been written with the precision of our age, we should have had either to recognise a real intervention of the Deity, or a lie invented for the purpose of creating a belief in such intervention; but coming from an epoch when there was no criticism, these simple documents express themselves without artifice, and conformably to the opinions received at the time when they were written down. In order to get at the truth, we have only to translate the language of the ancients into our language. So long as the human mind had not yet penetrated the true cause of physical phenomena it attributed everything to supernatural power: high thoughts, great resolutions, useful inventions, and, above all, dreams of lively imagery, came from a god. It was not only the people that took in these easy explanations; the superior men had not themselves any doubt in these respects, and boasted with perfect conviction of their relations with the Deity.

Under these marvellous narratives of the Bible we must then, says Eichhorn, search for natural and simple facts expressed according to the habit of infant people. Thus the smoke and the flame of Sinai were nothing but a fire which Moses lighted upon the mountain to excite the imagination of the people, and with which, by chance, there coincided a violent storm; the luminous column was a torch which they carried in front of the caravan; the radiant appearance of the face of the legislator was a consequence of the great overheating; and he himself, ignoring the real cause, saw, with the people, something divine in it.

It was an immense step to have subjected the body of Hebrew writings to the same method of interpretation as the rest of the works of the human mind, however defective that method of interpretation might then be. It



required some time to embolden one to treat the writings of the New Testament in the same way, composed as they were in an epoch nearer our own, and being, besides, objects of more special veneration. Eichhorn, like all reformers, hesitated at the first step, and applied very timidly only the rationalistic method to the evangelical facts; he scarcely ventured to apply the natural sense to some of the narratives in the history of the Apostles, as the conversion of St. Paul, the miracle of the Pentecost, the angelic appearances. It was in 1800 that Dr. Paulus entered full sail into this new sea, and laid the first foundations of a critical history of Jesus. Paulus distinguished with much delicacy, what is done in a narrative (the objective element) from the judgment of the narrator (the subjective element). The fact, that is, the reality which serves to base the narrative; the judgment of the fact, that is, the manner in which the spectator or the narrator views it, the explanation which is given of it to himself—the manner, in a word, in which the fact is refracted in his individuality. The Gospels, according to Paulus, are histories written by credulous men under the influence of a lively imagination. The Evangelists are historians after the fashion of those artless witnesses who, in relating the most simple matter, cannot help themselves from presenting it to us with the additions of their chief. In order to get at the truth, we must place ourselves at the point of view of the epoch, and separate the real fact from the embellishments which a credulous faith and a taste for the marvellous have added to it. Paulus held firmly to the historic truth of the narratives; he strove to introduce into the evangelical history a rigorous concatenation of dates and facts; but these facts have nothing which requires a supernatural intervention. To him, Jesus is not the Son of God in the sense of the Church, but he is a wise and virtuous man: they are not miracles which

he does, but they are acts partly of goodness and philanthropy, partly of medical skill, and partly of chance and good fortune.

Some examples will serve to make it understood that such a mode of interpretation, however ingenious, was more often subtle and forced. Let us take first the Gospel narrative of the birth of John the Baptist. This narrative includes two supernatural, and, consequently, inadmissible circumstances—the appearance of the angel and the dumbness suffered by Zacharias. The exegetes, of whom we speak, explain the apparition of the angel by the constant laws of *angelophania*. To the one, it was a man who told the father of John the Baptist that which he himself attributed to a divine messenger. To the others, it was a ray of light which struck his imagination; to others, it was a dream; to others, an ecstasy or hallucination caused by the mental state in which he was, and by the religious function he had performed. With his mind excited in the semi-obscurity of the sanctuary, he thought, whilst he was praying, of the object for which he most ardently wished; he hoped to be favourably heard, and he was in consequence disposed to see a sign in everything which could show itself. The smoke of the incense, shone upon by the lamps, formed figures; the priest imagined he saw a celestial being, who frightened him at first, but from the mouth of whom he soon believed that he heard consolatory promises. Scarcely does a slight doubt arise in his heart than the scrupulous Zacharias looks upon himself as guilty of unbelief, and feels himself reprimanded by the being sent from God. As to the dumbness, a double explanation is possible: either a sudden apoplexy really paralysed the tongue of Zacharias, which he regarded as a punishment of his doubts, or Zacharias, from a Jewish superstition, forbade himself the use for some time of words which he accused himself of having



employed in a wrongful manner. All the incidents of the narrative are thus accepted as real, but explained without a miracle: the new exegetes do not for one moment dream of asking if the narrative in question was not a fiction, conceived on the model of circumstances such as the Old Testament attributes to the birth of all the great men.

Let us take, again, for example, the narrative of the Gospels as to the fasting which Jesus underwent for forty days. If we believe the rationalists, forty was a round number to signify several days, or the abstinence was not complete, and did not exclude herbs and roots. One of them even observed that it was well said that Jesus had eaten nothing, but not that he had drunk nothing; but, added he, we have seen an enthusiast sustain himself during forty-five days with water and tea, without any nourishment.

The other marvellous circumstances in the life of Jesus were explained in an analogous manner. The celestial light of the shepherds of Bethlehem was neither more nor less than a lantern which was carried before their eyes. The star of the Magi was a comet; and if it was said that the star accompanied them on their voyage, that should be understood as the light they would carry before them during the night. When they relate that Jesus walked upon the sea, these would say that He rejoined His disciples by swimming, or in walking along the shore. Another time He calmed the tempest by taking the helm with a firm hand. The multiplication of the loaves is explained by secret stores, or by the provisions which the congregation had brought with them in their pockets. The rich had too much of it; the poor had too little, or they had none at all. Jesus, with true philanthropy, advised them to dine in common, and then every one had something. The angels of the Resurrection were nothing else than the white

winding-sheets, which the pious women took for celestial beings. The Ascension was the same, reduced to the proportions of a natural fact, by the hypothesis of a mist, under cover of which Jesus adroitly escaped, and saved Himself on the other side of the mountain.

This was certainly a narrow interpretation, but little fitted to preserve the dignity of the character of Jesus—an interpretation full of subtlety, founded on the mechanical employment of some proceedings (ecstasy, lightning, storm, cloud, &c.)—explanations otherwise inconsequent from the theological point of view; for if the sacred narrators deserve any faith under the circumstances, why hold so strongly to their veracity upon the base of the narrative? Errors of detail are not more compatible with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit than impostures. We are not slow to feel the insufficiency of a method of interpretation so scanty. Eichhorn himself, the father of Biblical evhemerism, recognised the necessity for a larger exegesis in respect of some part of the books of the Old Testament, and particularly for the traditions relating to the creation and the fall of man. After having tried different natural explanations of these traditions, and felt, as a scrupulous theologian, that it would have been unworthy of the Deity to have allowed the insertion of a mythological fragment in a revealed book, he recognised the puerility of like attempts, and saw in the before-mentioned narrative only the mythical translation of this philosophical thought. The desire for a better state is the source of all the evil in the world.

## II.

The explanation called rationalistic satisfied the first need of hardihood which the human mind experienced in taking possession of a territory so long forbidden. But



experience soon revealed its irremediable defects, its aridity and coarseness. There never was a better illustration of the ingenious allegory of the daughters of Minyas, who were changed into bats for having seriously criticised the vulgar beliefs of the age. There is as much good-nature and credulity, but much less poetry, in discussing legends clumsily in detail, as in accepting them in their entirety once for all. We rightly treat as barbarous the hagiographers of the seventeenth century, who, in writing the *Vie des Saints*, admit certain miracles, and reject others as being too difficult of belief. It is clear that upon this principle they ought to have rejected all; and to a mean critic, who does violence to the text in order to be but half reasonable, we prefer, from the esthetic point of view, the manner of the Saint Elizabeth of M. Montalembert, where the fables are collected without distinction, in such a way that it is throughout doubtful whether the author believes all, or whether he believes nothing. At least we remain free to suppose that he does not wish to raise difficulties, and the book thus composed has an incontestable merit as a work of art. Such also was the fine and poetic method of Plato; such is the secret of the inimitable charm which his half-believing, half-doubting dealing with the popular myths gives to his philosophy.<sup>1</sup> But to accept

<sup>1</sup> "Phædon: Tell me, Socrates, is there not here some part upon the banks of the Illissus where Boreas carried off the young Oreithyia? Socrates: They say so. . . . But tell me, as a favour, do you believe in this fabulous adventure? If I doubted it, like the learned, I should not be much embarrassed; I could subtilise, and say that the north wind made one of the neighbouring rocks fall when she played with Pharmaceia, and that this kind of death gave rise to the belief that she was ravished by Boreas. For myself, my dear Phædon, I find these explanations very ingenious, but I confess they require too much labour and refinement, and they put a man in sufficiently sad position: for then he must be resigned also to explain in the same way the Hippocentaurs, after that the Chimera, then the Pegasus, the Gorgons, an innumerable host of other monsters, each more frightful than the other, who, if we refuse to believe in, and if we wish to bring

one part of these miraculous narratives and reject the other is perhaps only the act of a narrow mind. Nothing is less philosophic than to make a part impossible, and apply a realistic criticism to narratives conceived outside of all reality.

The study of comparative mythology produced new ideas from all parts of Germany. Heyne, Wolf, Niebuhr, and soon Ottfried Müller, unveiled Greek and Latin antiquity. India opened its treasures, and furnished invaluable documents, without which the history of the human mind would have been for ever incomplete. Heyne had proclaimed this beautiful principle: "*A mythis omnis priscorum hominum cum historia tum philosophia procedit.*" Gabler, Bauer, Vater, and De Wette applied to sacred history the principles of criticism so delicately recognised as applicable to profane history, and in 1802 Bauer brought out a *Hebrew Mythology of the Old and New Testament*.

The most ancient history of all people, said Bauer, is mythical: why should the history of the Hebrews form the only exception, when a glance at the books of the Bible proves that they contain legends like those of other people? Here the new school triumphs easily, for where can we find mythological narratives more characteristic than those of the temptation of Eve, of Noah and the ark, of Babel, &c.? Since 1805 Wecklein, the professor of theology at Munster, has taught that the carrying away of Enoch and Elijah had no more reality about it than that of Ganymede; that the appearance of the angel to Hagar was of the same kind as that of Apollo to Diomedes; that Jehovah helped Gideon and Samson like Jupiter did

them to a probability, require subtleties almost as odd as themselves, and a great loss of time. I have not so much leisure. . . . I give up then the study of all these histories, and restrict myself to believe as the common people believe. I occupy myself not with these indifferent things, but with myself."—*Trans. of M. Cousin*, vol. vi. pp. 7-9.



the Trojans. The new explanation soon becomes a complete theory. In the Bible there were myths, historical, philosophical, and poetical, and soon they found in the history of the Hebrews all the traits of that primitive age when the human mind, without calculation or artifice, only knows how to express the truth under the cover of fable. What absurdity, say the exegetes of the new school to the rationalists, to take away the marvellous from the Pentateuch, for example, whilst all the evidence shows that the writer, in a number of places, believed he was recounting miracles! They wish to understand his words better than himself. Similar narratives ought not to be treated as historical; they are legendary and traditional. Tradition, says De Wette, has no discernment; its tendency is not historical, but patriotic and poetical. Most of the narratives are beautiful, honourable to the nation, and better received when marvellous. If here and there, some gaps are to be found, the imagination soon fills them up. It is an odd thing, and only understood in Germany, that such a system should be proposed by theologians as the only means of defending the Bible against the objections of its adversaries.

As the evhemeristic interpretation had been applied to the narratives of the Old Testament before it was applied to those of the New, so some time elapsed before the mythological exegetes permitted themselves to touch the holy of holies. But the propensity was fatal. Bauer, without treating the Gospel as a mythic history at the end of the other, had already found there some isolated myths, and confessed that the narratives of the infancy of Jesus, for example, were not open to any other explanation. They were derived, said he, from the natural leaning which gives rise to so many marvellous anecdotes on the youth of celebrated men—*anecdotes which find ready credence with posterity.* Besides, the Evangelists could not have

had any historical document relating to his early years, because Jesus had not then excited any attention. Almost all the exegetes ingenuously admit that the narratives of the Gospels do not merit such confidence as those of the latter years of the life of Jesus, and the most timid confine themselves to regarding the chapters relating to the infancy in Luke and Matthew as apocryphal interpolations.

Thus the mythological explanation, admitted at first on the threshold of the Old Testament, was now upon the threshold of the New; but we were forbidden very seriously from proceeding farther. These barriers were not long in falling. The latter circumstances in the life of Jesus, above all the Ascension, appeared to be stamped with the same characteristics as those of the infancy, and seemed to require the same explanation. Thus the edifice was penetrated at both extremities, and, following the expression of a theologian, they entered into evangelical history by the triumphal arch of the myth, and went out of it by a similar way; but for all the intermediate space, they had to content themselves with the tortuous and painful byways of natural explanation.

They were not content for long. Gabler thought he saw myths in all the miraculous circumstances of the public life. Indeed, says he, from the moment that the idea of the myth was introduced into the Gospel, no line of demarcation could be traced, and from the beginning to the end the myth penetrates to the core of evangelical history. Why stop at the baptism of Jesus, when that scene itself is related in a manner evidently legendary? If the Ascension is placed among the myths, why not recognise the same character in the Resurrection, the apparition of Gethsemane, &c.? Thus disregarding the limits which they would impose upon it, the myth has made positive inroads on the history of Jesus.

After this victory the mythological school, however,



offered numberless varieties. On the side of mythical explanation, many still admitted the evhemeristic interpretation or intermingled the two in different proportions. They did not give up searching for history in the Gospel; the more learned declared that it was scarcely possible to distinguish the part which ought to be considered real from the part which was symbolical. Criticism, they said, was not an instrument sharp enough to separate the two elements from each other; all that they could arrive at was a kind of probability and say, "Here is more historical reality; there myth and poetry predominate."

Germany never stays upon the road of speculation, and almost always passes beyond the limit in the application of theory. The eclectic mythologists were succeeded by the absolute, who endeavoured to explain all the circumstances of the Gospels as pure myths, and gave up the attempt to extract an historic residue. Dr. David Frederic Strauss has made himself a European reputation by presenting this system with a vast array of science and reasoning in his celebrated book, *The Life of Jesus*.<sup>1</sup>

"The ancient interpretation of the Church," says he in the preface to his first edition, "involves two suppositions—the first, that the Gospels include history; the second, that this history is a supernatural history. Rationalism, rejecting the second of these propositions, fastens on to the first the more strongly as it finds in these books a history, but a natural history. Science cannot thus rest half way; it must let go the other supposition; it must ascertain if and where we are upon historical ground in the Gospels; it is the natural course of things, and under these circumstances the appearance of a work of this kind is not only justified, but is moreover necessary."

<sup>1</sup> *The Life of Jesus, or Critical Examination of His History*, by Dr. D. F. Strauss, translated by M. E. Littré, of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. 2nd edit., 2 vols. Paris, Ladrangé, 1853.

Strauss is here perfectly right. We ought to thoroughly ignore the history of German theology for having heaped upon the name of a single man, as it has done, maledictions which result from all the intellectual work of which this is the recapitulation. To declaim against these inevitable appearances, to authorise what is partial and incomplete in order to deny what is legitimate, is to assail the destiny of reason on the necessary progress of the human mind. Strauss is one of the mooring-rings of modern science. The *Prolegomena*, the introductory observations to Homer of Wolf, were necessary to elucidate the life of Jesus. Certainly after Wolf the Homeric question, as after Strauss the evangelical question, has made much progress, but the errors even into which these two great critics have fallen are those which we ought to consider valuable as preparing us for the discovery of the truth.

Of all the thinkers of Germany, Strauss is perhaps the most appreciated in France. The greater part only know him from the injurious observations of his adversaries, and from having heard that a mad fellow of that name had denied the existence of Christ; for it is in terms equally absurd that they have characterised the Life of Jesus. On the other side, those who have regarded Strauss as an historian, freed from all prejudice foreign to science, have certainly mistaken his true character. Strauss, we must say—however surprising it may be to make this double assertion—Strauss is at once a theologian (to many, a timid one) and a philosopher of the school of Hegel.

Yes; we ought never to forget when we read the Life of Jesus that the book is a book of theology, a book of sacred exegesis, a book of the same order as those of Michaelis, Eichhorn, and Paulus, who pretend not to go out of the theological world. These are not the free and easy steps of independent science; this is a system of hermeneutics which opposes itself to another system with a pedantic



stiffness. In France, where the schism between theology and profane science is much more pronounced, where each of the two orders of study live apart and do not trouble each other, we cannot understand a phenomenon so singular. Voltaire would have been a professor in a theological faculty in Germany. The celebrated Gesenius, the boldest of rationalists, explained some years ago at Halle the *littérature hébraïque* in the midst of the plaudits of more than eight hundred hearers, all future ministers of the Holy Gospel. Strauss had been a professor of theology, and could have taught his system from the sacred chair. Let us hear him officially express, in this respect, the scruples of his timid conscience. "The author," says he, in the preface to the first edition, "knows that the internal evidence of Christian belief is completely independent of his critical researches. The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection, and his ascension remain eternal truths, but the reality of these things as historical facts may be open to some doubts. This certainly alone can give repose and dignity to our criticism, and distinguish it from the natural explanations of former ages—explanations which, proposing to overturn religious truth with historical fact, were necessarily struck with a character of frivolity. However, some may feel affected in their faith by researches of this nature. If it was thus for theologians, they would have in their science a remedy for such injury, which could not be spared to them from the moment they wished to remain behind in the development of our epoch. *As to the laity, it is true that the matter is not suitably prepared for them.* As to the present writing, it has been arranged so as to admit more than once the remark to the uninstructed laity that it is not meant for them; and if, from an imprudent curiosity or too much anti-heretical zeal, they are allowed to read it, they will carry it away (as Schleiermacher says under similar circumstances) with a pain in

their consciences, for they cannot escape the conviction that they do not understand what we wish to talk about."

Strauss, who has been introduced in France as a sort of antichrist, is then really a theologian; let us add, at the risk of appearing to seek a paradox, that this theologian is a disciple of Hegel. The Life of Jesus is at bottom only the philosophy of the chief of the contemporaneous German school applied to the evangelical narratives; the christology of the theologian is only the symbolic translation of the abstract thesis of the philosopher. God is not an inaccessible infinity, who obstinately resides outside and above the finite; who penetrates these in such a way that finite nature, that is to say, the world and the human mind, are only an alienation which he has made from himself, and from which they go out again to re-enter into his unity. Man has truth only as a finite being; God, again, has no reality, inasmuch as he is infinite and is included in his infinity. The true and real existence of the spirit is not, then, either God in himself nor man in himself, but it is in the God-man. From the moment that humanity is mature enough to make its religion of this truth, that God is man and that man is of divine race, an individual must arise whom we know to be the present God, this God-man containing in a single being the divine essence and human personality, truly a divine spirit for father and a human mother. Man of divine essence, he is without sin and perfect; he lords over nature; he performs miracles, however by his humanity he is dependent on nature; he is subject to suffering and to death. Opposed to men who do not overstep their finite nature, he ought to die by violence at the hand of the sinners; but he knows the means of getting out of this abyss, and to take the road towards himself. The death of the man-God being only the suppression of his alienation, there is in that circumstance an elevation and a return to God;



consequently his death is necessarily followed by the resurrection and the ascension.

This Christ *à priori*, one sees well, is still not the historic Christ, he who bore the name of Jesus. This is the human spirit, and the human spirit solely, which reunited all the attributes of the Hegelian Christ. There never has existed an individual, formed by a singular law from the divine essence and the human essence, dominating nature, performing miracles, resuscitated corporeally; there has never existed an individual more exclusively God, who has been before him, or who will be after him. That is not the proceeding by which the idea is realised. She does not waste all her riches on a single copy in order to be miserly towards the others. The unity of divine nature and of human nature, if we can conceive it, humanity like the incarnation, is it not real in a sense infinitely more elevated than if we limit it to an individual? A continued incarnation from God, is it not more true than an incarnation limited to a point of time? Placed in an individual, the properties and functions of Christ contradict themselves; they agree with the idea of species. Humanity is the reunion of the two natures, God-made man; that is to say, the infinite spirit alienates from itself the finite nature, and the finite spirit which recollects its infinity. It is the child of the visible mother and of the invisible father, of the spirit and of nature. It is that which performs miracles; for in the course of human history the spirit brings matter into subjection more and more. She is sinless, for the progress of her development is above reproach. Impurity never attaches but to the individual; it does not affect the species and its history. She it is who dies, is raised again, and ascends to heaven; for in throwing off the finite, which confined it as the individual spirit, national and planetary, she unites with the infinite.

Nevertheless, Hegelian christology, in placing its ideal

above Jesus as an historical personage, endeavours to make him take the part of Divine founder. At the head of all great acts of humanity are found individuals endowed with high faculties, whom we ordinarily designate by the title of genius, but who, when they act in religious movements, deserve a more holy name. Jesus was of this number. No man having had, and no man having, a more lively sentiment of his identity with the Celestial Father, it would not be possible to raise oneself above him in the matter of religion; whatever progress one might make in the other branches of intellectual culture. Without doubt we may perfect our religious faith after him, in getting rid of superstitions and of the belief in the supernatural; but this progress cannot be compared with the gigantic steps which Jesus has made for humanity in the course of its religious evolution. The unity of God and man was never manifested in the past, nor will it be manifested in the future, with a power capable of thus transfiguring a whole life. Discarding, then, the notions of sinlessness and of absolute perfection, the reality of which does not satisfy one, we conceive the Christ, says Strauss, like the being in the conscience of which the unity of the divine and the human is shown for the first time with energy, so as to leave but an infinitely small amount of the contrary elements, and who, in this sense, is unique and without equal in the history of the world, so that the religious idea overcome and promulgated by him cannot, in the detail, subtract from the law of progressive development.”<sup>1</sup>

Certainly this is strange language to us, and hardly fit to satisfy either the theologian or the critic. The mistakes we find in the work of Strauss are, to a certain extent,

<sup>1</sup> See in the *Life of Jesus* the final dissertation, and, above all, paragraph cxlviii., and see vol. ii., 2nd part, p. 744 *et seq.*, of the translation of M. Littré.



explained by the defects of the author's method: it is not until the ridiculous charge is made against him, the denial of the existence of Jesus, which is really devoid of any serious foundation, that we can find any pretext in the abstract tone of the *Life of Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> Failing the sentiment of history and facts, Strauss never goes into questions of myths and symbols. We say that, as far as he is concerned, the primitive events of Christianity have passed out of real existence and out of nature. Strauss has fully seen that the series of the Gospels invites criticism, and that all the narratives of the Evangelists cannot be accepted as certain; and the contradictions of the four texts are a clear proof of this. Would any historian conclude from that circumstance that the evangelical narratives do not correspond to any reality? Certainly not. Strauss, exclusively pre-occupied with the necessity of substituting one system of exegesis for another, does not regard small differences. The historic reality of some of the circumstances related by the Evangelists being doubtful, all realistic exegesis is compromised in his eyes, and he thinks it necessary to replace it by a theory which, without being liable to the same difficulties, he applies with inflexible rigour to the sacred text from one end to the other.

We can see now why the book of Strauss, in spite of its perhaps exaggerated renown, has remained isolated, and has satisfied no one. The historian found it too empty of facts; the critic, too uniform in its procedure; the theologian founded on it an hypothesis subversive of Christianity. Let us say it boldly: it is not to one exclusive system that the solution of a problem so difficult as the origins of

<sup>1</sup> This point has been thoroughly developed by M. Colani in the *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie Chrétienne*, January and March 1856, Paris and Geneva Cherbuliez. The two articles of M. Colani show beyond contradiction the best appreciation which has been shown in France of Strauss's book.

Christianity can be given. A single method does not suffice to explain the complicated phenomena of the human mind. All primitive history and all the religious legends present the real and the ideal mixed in different proportions; and if India has been able to cut out from pure mythology, poems of two hundred thousand distiches, we may well believe that the same could have been done in Judea. The Jewish people, indeed, have always had a power of imagination inferior to that of the Indo-European people, and in the epoch of Christ it was surrounded, and, as it were, penetrated by the historic spirit. I still believe that for epochs and for countries which are not entirely mythological, the marvellous is less often a pure creation of the human mind than a fantastic mode of representing real facts. In these days of reflection we see things by the light of reason; credulous ignorance, on the other hand, sees them by the light of the moon, distorted by an illusive and uncertain light. Timid credulity changes in this half light, natural objects into phantoms; but it is only hallucination which creates beings in their entirety without exterior cause. The same with the ordinary unrefined country legends; they are more often made up from imperfect observation, from vague tradition, from the commonest hearsay, by distance between the circumstance and the narrative, by the desire to glorify the heroes, than by pure creation or invention like that which serves to constitute almost all Indo-European mythology; or, to express it better, all the processes have contributed in undistinguishable proportions to the tissue of these wonderful embellishments which confound all scientific categories, and over the formation of which the most exuberant fancy has presided. It is not, then, without many restrictions that we can use the word "myth" as applicable to the evangelical narrative. This expression, which has a complete aptitude when applied to India and



primitive Greece, which is already incorrect when applied to the ancient traditions of the Hebrews and the Semitic people in general, does not represent the true complexion of the phenomenon for an epoch as advanced as that of Jesus in the ways of a certain reflection. I should, for my part, prefer the words *legends* and *legendary narratives*, which, in giving a large share to the operation of opinion, leave the works and personal *rôle* of Jesus in their entirety.

It would be unjust towards Strauss to pretend that he has desired to explain everything by myth; for by the side of pure myth he recognises historical myth, legends, and additions by the writer, and furnishes rules in detail for the discernment of the historical from the fabulous.<sup>1</sup> All at once, the reaction against evhemerism has evidently carried him away too far. The contradictions of the Evangelists upon the circumstances of a narrative, appeared to him an objection against the historic truth of that narrative. But there are facts for which this divergence, on the contrary, supposes a foundation of reality; such, for example, are the three denials of St. Peter, related by the four Evangelists each in a different way, but always very characteristic. A reproach not less serious which, on the same principle, affects the book of Strauss is to have misunderstood the importance of the personal part of Jesus. It seems, on reading it, that the religious revolution which bears the name of Christ was effected without the Christ. Certainly, we should not deny that the proceeding by which he explains the formation of almost all these evangelical narratives has indeed had a certain degree of importance, and that some of the traits of the life of Jesus owe their light to reasoning analogous to these. The Messiah ought to be the son of David, but Jesus is the Messiah; then Jesus is the son of David; then there must be a genealogy by which he is connected with the royal

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Jesus* Introduction, pp. xiv.-xv.

race. The Messiah ought to be born at Bethlehem, but Jesus is the Messiah; there must then be some circumstances so as he, who passed almost all his life in Galilee, and probably was born there, should be born at Bethlehem. The Messianic idea, in its principal features, was copied from the life and character of the prophets and the great men of the ancient law; it was then inevitable that the life of Jesus should reproduce on many points these consecrated types.<sup>1</sup> Thus the birth of Samuel, related at the beginning of the Book of Kings, and that of Samson, almost similar,<sup>2</sup> became the model of all the births of illustrious men. A sterility deplored for a long time, the appearance of an angel or annunciation, some kind of sacerdotal scene, a canticle, then the child consecrated to God and reserved or a great destiny—such was the indispensable framework. The whole narrative of the third Gospel as to the birth of John the Baptist, and several of the circumstances connected with that of Jesus—among others, the canticle of Mary, evidently imitated from that of Anne; lastly, in the Apocryphal Gospels, which exaggerate the copy in the most tedious manner and surround the birth of Mary with an analogous scene.<sup>3</sup>

But it would be a wrong to the comprehensive power of the human mind to explain the creation of the whole of the evangelic legend by this single method. Oftentimes, on the contrary, there were individual peculiarities of Jesus

<sup>1</sup> This explains the oft-repeated formula *ὡς πληρωθῇ ἡ γραφή*. They have gratuitously distorted grammar to prove that *ὡς* in this phrase ought to be translated by *so that* with the indicative, instead of *in order to*. See *Life of Jesus*, by Kuhn, translated by M. Fr. Nettement, pp. 292-294.

<sup>2</sup> Judges xiii.

<sup>3</sup> See the Gospel of the Nativity of St. Mary, chap. iii. This composition, more modern and more thought out, gives the moral reason for the legend. It is in order to show that the child who is born, is a gift of God, and not the fruit of an unruly passion. The name of Anne, given to the mother of Mary, is no doubt a reminiscence of that of Anne, the mother of Samuel.



which modified the idea of the Messiah. Many of the traits which are given by the Evangelists, and above all by St. Matthew (chaps. i. and ii.), as Messianic traits, far from belonging to the received ideal of the Jews and plainly drawn, are only artificial reconciliations, simple ornaments of style which are explained by the arbitrary manner of citing Scripture, of which the Talmud and St. Paul afford numerous examples. In the cases I speak of, it is a veritable fact in the life of Jesus which has given rise to the application of a Biblical text where no one would have thought, until then, of seeing allusions to the Messiah. When, for example, a circumstance of the Passion suggests to the Evangelist the citation of this verse of a psalm, "*They have divided my garments, and they have cast lots for my coat,*" shall we say that it is the desire to show the accomplishment of a prophecy which has invented this circumstance? It is much more probable, on the contrary, that it is a real incident which has given rise to the citation. At this distance of time, and deprived of historic monuments, we ought not to expect to distinguish plainly the reciprocal action and reaction of the personal character of Jesus and of the ideal portrait we have drawn of him in advance. Supposing even that all we should do by balancing without profound thought these two syllogisms: The Messiah ought to do that; but Jesus is the Messiah; then Jesus has done that: Jesus has done that; but Jesus is the Messiah; then the Messiah ought to do that—syllogisms founded on the minor premiss: Jesus is the Messiah,—it does not the less remain that this minor itself should be explained. Without doubt, as M. Colani has very well said, once that the Apostles have believed in Jesus being the Messiah, they could add to his real image some features borrowed from prophecy. But how came they to believe in his being the Messiah? Strauss has not explained this. What he leaves subsisting in the

Gospels is not sufficient to account for the faith of the Apostles; and although we may say that there was a disposition among them to be content with the least degree of proof, it must be that these proofs had been very strong to overcome the distressing doubts occasioned by the death on the cross. It must have been, in other words, that the person of Jesus had singularly exceeded the ordinary proportions, it must have been that a great part of the evangelical narrative was true.

As the apologists, in attributing to the first disciples of Jesus a degree of reflection and rational discussion which did not belong to their time, failed in the essential principles of criticism, so Strauss shows himself to be an unphilosophic historian when he neglects to explain how, in the eyes of the world in which he lived, Jesus attained a sufficient realisation of the ideal of the Messiah. We agree that this realisation was not positively explained; that many of the features in which, later on, they saw a demonstration of the identity of Jesus with the Messiah were not yet conceived as features of the Messiah; that the general credulity left the ground easy for affirmations and miraculous narratives; but it is a fact that this was solely produced by the action of one powerful individuality. This was the appearance of the new doctrine, the effect which it produced, the spirit of sacrifice, the devotion it inspired. We can affirm that if France, better endowed than Germany with the sentiment of practical life, and less subject to substitute in history the action of ideas for the play of passion and individual character, had undertaken to write the life of Christ in a scientific manner, she would have employed a more strict method, and that, in avoiding to transfer the problem, as Strauss has done, into the domain of abstract speculation, she would have approached much nearer to the truth.



## III.

The book of Strauss had an immense effect in Germany. Numerous adversaries, Protestant and Catholic, among whom we may name Hug, Neander, Tholuck, and Ullmann, came forward to defend the historic reality of the facts of the Gospels against the author of the *Life of Jesus*.<sup>1</sup> All, or nearly all, endeavoured to prove, of the one part, that myth was impossible at the time when Christianity appeared; of the other, that the work necessary for the formation of myth could not have taken place between the death of Jesus and the epoch when his history was reduced into writing; all were thus struck with the truly weak points of the book of Strauss. The use of the word "myth" gave rise, as we have said, to the gravest objections. More than that, the system of Strauss as to the age and composition of the Gospels has always been uncertain and defective.

It is an important point, indeed, in his theory that our four Gospels could not have been framed in their present form until the end of the second century. The most

<sup>1</sup> The history of this polemic is very well told by M. Colani, *Revue de Théologie*, March 1856. I cannot do better than refer the reader to it. M. Colani has not thought proper to speak of the work of Dr. Sepp, translated in part by M. Ch. Ste.-Foi (Paris, 1854). This work, indeed, has but little scientific value, but it is not without interest for the purpose of understanding the kind of Christian cabbala that the German apologists believed should be opposed to the researches of rational criticism. Never had the antiquated system, which pretends to discover under all the mythologies, been pushed to such an extent. We think we are dreaming when we see a man, otherwise very intelligent, making calculations as to the coming of the Messiah by the magnetic needle and the laws of electricity, making the nervous system the seat of prophecy, seeking what he calls the year of the Lord in the mysteries of Indian, Chinese, Etruscan, and Babylonian chronologies, and saying to us seriously chronology is in its entirety like a harp, composed of several strings. When we touch one, we feel it resounds; so in the chronological systems of other people we find sympathetic tones, as if one hand had mounted them all after the same

ancient testimonies of the second century only say that an apostle or an apostolic man had written a Gospel, but they do not establish the fact that the primitive Gospels were identical with those which we possess. We must admit, according to Strauss, that the legendary elements of the life of Jesus remained for about a century and a half in a state of ebullition, and did not begin to agglomerate until the disciples of the eye-witnesses had themselves disappeared. We can understand the latitude which this interval affords to the mythological school for the elaboration of an entire cycle of the marvellous.

The question of the precise age and of the system of compilation of the Gospels is so delicate,<sup>1</sup> that I would rather avoid treating it here; it is sufficient for me to say that the more I have considered it, the more I am disposed to believe that the four texts recognised as canonical, carry us very near the age of Christ, if not for their last compilation, at least for the documents which compose them.

Pure products of the Christianity of Palestine, exempt from all Hellenic influence, full of vivid sentiment direct from Jerusalem, they are undoubtedly an immediate echo of the sounds of the first Christian generation. The popular

principle. . . . The mind which has constructed this vast edifice of numbers is the divine revelation, of which the remains have been preserved in the sacerdotal traditions of the different people; at least, we only say that those who have instinctively learned the science which supplies the harmony of our solar system, and which reveals to us, in the order of the spheres in which the planets move, the prophetic numbers indicating the Messiah (vol. ii. pp. 417, 473, &c.). See what M. Sepp calls mathematical and astronomical proofs, which ought to convince the Jews, if they do not shut their eyes to the truth, that Jesus is the Messiah; and see the book which has been put forward as a hammer by which rationalism is to be smashed entirely.

<sup>1</sup> The most recent work upon this point is that of M. Ewald in the *Jahrbücher der biblischen Wissenschaft*, 1850-54. See also the observations of M. Bunsen, *Hippolytus and his Age*, pp. 35, 48, 199, 2nd edit., whilst awaiting the more developed works the same savant promises us on evangelical history



work which caused them to dawn, accomplished without any distinct consciousness and from several sides at once, could not have great unity. Here it was one genealogy, there it was another; here a marvellous narrative, there another; the fundamental type alone preserved, in spite of all contradictions, its identical physiognomy. The compilation was more fluctuating still, and, like that, it had a place in all the epic and religious cycles, but only of secondary importance. It is not until the end of the creative period, at the moment when they come to preserve the tradition, that we see the disposition of the four texts perfectly settled; from that moment we can apply to these texts, considerations of authenticity and integrity which before had no strict sense.

All at once the work of the legend is stayed. Every creation destined to captivate the admiration or the faith of human nature passes through two distinct phases: the truly fruitful epoch, where we find in the depth of the conscience of the masses grand poetical features, and the epoch of repairing, adjusting of verbal amplifications, where the faculty of invention being lost, we only develop previous narratives according to conventional procedure. The first age which demands our attention in the order of traditions, is that which has produced the four Canonical Gospels, all stamped with the same character of sobriety, simplicity, grandeur, and plain truth. The second is that of the Apocryphal Gospels, artificial compositions, where the exhausted vein is only sustained by means of commonplace and forced amplifications (apparitions of angels, canticles, imitations of the Old Testament). Nothing is more like the mechanism of the factitious epic poems composed during the ages of decadence. The apocryphal Gospels are to the canonical Gospels what the ante-Homerics and the post-Homerics are to Homer, what the Puranas in Hindu literature are to the more ancient mythological

poems. There is a fashion to rejuvenate primitive traditions by inserting all the features of the original text in a new narrative, by adding what should most probably happen, by developing the situation at its junctions, by making (if I may use the word) a monograph of each minute detail; all this without genius and without ever departing from the original theme. In a word, it is a reflected and literary composition, having for its foundation an artless and spontaneous work.

These two periods in the life of the legend correspond in the main to the two ages of every religion;—the primitive age, when the new belief arises out of the popular instincts, like the ray arises out of the sun; the age of simple faith, without mental reserve, without objection or refutation; and the reflective age, when objection and apology are produced, when the requirements of reason are made evident, when the marvellous, heretofore an easy and harmonious reflex of the moral feelings of humanity, becomes timid, mean, and sometimes immoral. There is in primitive supernaturalism something so powerful and so elevated, that the most austere rationalism handles it sometimes with regret; but reflection is too advanced, the imagination too frigid, to permit henceforth these magnificent digressions. As for the timid compromise which seeks to reduce the supernatural in order to reconcile it with an intellectual state which includes the negation of the miracle, it only succeeds in clashing with the most imperious instincts of the scientific epochs, without reviving the wonderful old poetry exclusively reserved for certain ages and for certain states of the human mind.

The history of religions presents some facts which, without being entirely analogous to precedent (Jesus is altogether unique, and nothing can be compared to him), can throw a little light upon the matters we are about to discuss. The legend of Buddha, Sakya Mouni is that



which most resembles by its mode of formation the legend of Christ, as Buddhism is the religion which by the law of its development bears the most resemblance to Christianity. Sakya Mouni is a reformer whose real existence is not doubtful, although his life does not afford us more than the features of an ideal perfection. Sakya Mouni is conceived without stain, nursed without pain at the foot of a tree, recognised at his birth by holy personages. Sakya Mouni quits the world, is tempted by the devil, surrounds himself with disciples, performs innumerable miracles.<sup>1</sup> His reform, almost obliterated in India, produces immense results out of that country. He wrote nothing himself, but three of his disciples reduced to writing his doctrine and his legend. The one and the other remained fluctuating and susceptible of increase until the great council of Pataliputra: this council even did not prevent an ulterior work, which was closed definitively by another council held about four hundred years after the death of the founder. The enthusiast Chaitanya, who, at the beginning of the sixteenth century of our era, promoted a great religious movement in certain parts of India, had also a marvellous biography very much developed, and was regarded as an incarnation of Bhagwan.<sup>2</sup> The legend of Krishna has accounts not less striking in appearance than those of the Messiah. His first days are threatened by a massacre exactly like that of Herod; his infancy amidst the shepherds is only a series of miracles; he dies nailed by an arrow to a fatal tree.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See *L'Introduction à l'Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien*, by M. Eugene Bournouf, vol. i. p. 195; and the *Lalita Vistara*, or the *Life of Buddha*, translated by M. Edouard Foucaux (Paris, 1848).

<sup>2</sup> See the *Chaitanya Chandrodaya*, published in the *Bibliotheca Indica* of the Society of Calcutta, Nos. 47, 48, 80, and Wilson's Essay upon the Religious Sects of the Hindoos in the *Asiatic Researches of the Society of Calcutta*, vol. xvi. p. 109 *et seq.*

<sup>3</sup> See the *Bhagavat dasam askand*, translated by M. Pavie (Paris, 1852)

But these perhaps are rather external resemblances than analogies of procedure.<sup>1</sup> It is certain that, compared with the Bhagavat Purana, the Gospel presents us with a singular historic character, or, if it be preferred, with a very uniform procedure. The miracles of the Gospel are in general conceived according to natural analogies, and do not bid too much defiance to the laws of physics, like the marvellous of Indo-European mythology. The creation there is entirely moral, the invention of the facts and circumstances has nothing bold about it, and is limited to a timid copy of the common-places of the Old Testament. The only episode in the history of Christ which has an epic character, the descent into hell, is not mentioned in the Canonical Gospels. Indicated for the first time in the Epistles of St. Peter (I. ch. iii. vers. 19-22), this circumstance has only received great development in the later compositions, above all in the Gospel of Nicodemus, a singular work, which seems to owe its origin to the metaphors by which the Fathers of the fourth century were pleased to express the triumph of Christ over death.<sup>2</sup> It is, then, the name of legend, and not that of myth, that we ought to apply to the narratives of the first Christian origins: the ideal Gospel was the result of a transfiguration, and not of a creation. Shall we say that the Jewish people, having already gone through all the degrees of a literary development, were no longer in the intellectual condition which agrees with

<sup>1</sup> Let us add that an hypothesis proposed at the beginning of the *Indian Studies* (since abandoned), according to which the legend of Krishna included borrowed facts from the Gospel of Infancy, a Gospel which had been so popular in the East, and which was doubtless carried to India by the Manicheans seemed to find favour with the most able philologists of Germany

<sup>2</sup> See the work of M. Alfred Maury upon the age of this Gospel in the twentieth volume of the *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de France* (Paris, 1850).



the appearance of legendary narratives? Strauss has answered rightly that the Hebrew people have, to speak truly, never had a clear notion of positive history; that their most recent historical books, those of the Maccabees, the same as those of Josephus, whose authors were initiated in Hellenic culture, are not free from marvellous narrative; that the *Mischna*, later than the Gospels, hardly seems to be a work of the human mind, so full is it of fable; that they have no history in which the non-reality of the miracle is comprehended. If rational education, which supposes a clear view of this non-reality, is wanting to so many people in the present day, how much more was it rare in the epoch of Jesus in Palestine, and generally among the masses in the Roman empire! Religious exaltation finds everything credible, and under the influence of a strong enthusiasm we have sometimes seen a new creative faculty awakened among the most exhausted people. Humanity elsewhere is not synchronous in its development. For all places situated under the same meridian, the sun is not visible at the same moment: those who live on the summit of mountains perceive it sooner than those who dwell in the valleys. So it is with the epoch of reflection, of criticism, and of history; it does not rise for all nations at the same hour. Our nineteenth century is not very mythological, and yet at this very time, among some portions of humanity who continue in the spontaneous state, myths are produced as in ancient times. Napoleon is already, among the Arabs, a fabulous legend very much developed. When traces of La Perouse were discovered, it was found that he had become with the savages the object of strange and fantastic traditions. I do not know of any myths more characteristic than those which appear every day still from the effect of Christian preaching among certain populations in the South of

Africa.<sup>1</sup> It is not the date of the age which constitutes the intellectual state of humanity, it is the tradition of civilisation; these are the numberless influences which bring, sometimes from ages of interval and from different points of space, states more or less analogous to those we have already passed through. This analogy, it is true, is never perfect, and there is in it a true inconvenience, for example, to apply the same name to the intellectual productions of the epoch of Jesus and to those of the primitive epochs of Greece or India. But when once we have remarked this, that such a denomination is inexact, we have the right to notice the common features which, in spite of notable differences, have at all times characterised the unsophisticated works of the human mind.

After all, the hypothesis of Strauss, which at first presents itself as being outrageous to the most sacred dogmas, leaves a great part to mystery. The mythological school, totally denying miracles and supernatural order, preserve a sort of psychological miracle. At least the god is not produced in full daylight, but like a winged insect under a web, which hides its dull appearance. We know that Nature alone has acted under this veil, but we have not seen these acts; the imagination was free to surround the cradle of the nascent god with respect and admiration. There was something divine still there, like the beginning of all the great poems of which the formation is unknown, and which, born in the depths of humanity, show themselves all complete in the full light of day.

Strauss is essentially a moderate mind (what young Germany calls timid).<sup>2</sup> When the newspapers in 1848

<sup>1</sup> See the voyage of an English Missionary, Robert Moffat, *Twenty three Years of Sojourn in the South of Africa*, translated by H. Monod, Paris, 1846, pp. 84, 157-158.

We must distinguish, however, in this respect, two epochs in the life of Strauss. The one anterior to the revolution of Zurich (1839), during which he displayed, amid attacks often unjust and acrimonious much



tell us that the author of the Life of Jesus, called upon to take a political part, attached himself to the reactionary right, we naturally ask if in that fact we ought to see a conversion, like those which always bring about radical revolutions. It was in reality the natural development of his character. Strauss in theology is a liberal of the extreme left, and not a radical. At a certain time we have burned right divine in true revolutionary fashion, but we keep something which resembles it. Strauss ought then to be, as we have said, passed by: he has been so. Some years have sufficed to heap upon him three or four layers of ultra-Hegelians, who have outbid the paradox, and have called the author of the Life of Jesus orthodox and timorous, and a believer in the Holy Ghost.

The great defect in the intellectual development of Germany is the abuse of reflection, I should rather say application, purposely done, to the present situation of the human mind, of laws recognised in the past. The philosophy of history, in verifying the necessary progress of the systems, the laws which succeed them, and the manner in which they oscillate towards the truth, *until they follow their natural course*, has brought to light a speculative truth of the first order, but which becomes very dangerous when we seek to draw from it consequences for that which passes under our own eyes. For to admit, without any examination, that such a light and superficial spirit as proposes to collect the inheritance of a man of genius is preferable to that which only comes after him, is to reduce the best part to mediocrity. See, however, the fault which

moderation and good faith, giving way to objects with perfect sincerity, and modifying his system according to what appeared to him to be the truth; the other, after the unhappy slander, which was the involuntary occasion when we feel the rebound of violence and the declamations of his adversaries. The polemical intention is no longer concealed, and it reappears in the concessions he has made, in particular, on the subject of the personal part of Jesus.

Germany often commits. After the appearance of a great work of philosophy or science, we are certain to see a whole swarm of critics come out who pretend to go beyond it, and often only spoil it or misconstrue it. Let us say it again, the law of progress of systems is only applicable when the production of systems is perfectly spontaneous, and their authors, without dreaming to advance one before the other, are only attentive to the intrinsic consideration of the truth. To neglect this important condition is to surrender the development of the human mind to chance, or to the caprices of some rash and presumptuous minds.

Strauss has said that revelation is neither an inspiration from without nor an isolated act; it is one and the same thing as the history of human kind. The appearance of Jesus Christ is only the implanting of a new and divine principle; it is an offshoot from the very marrow of divinely gifted humanity.<sup>1</sup> The new school, on the contrary (if we can reunite under this name writings very dissimilar, but reunited by several features in common—Weisse, Wilke, and Bruno-Bauer), pretend to explain the appearance of Christianity by simple and natural means, and to reduce the formation of the legend of Jesus to the proportions of a very ordinary circumstance. Strauss had attributed everything to the slow and concealed action of a tradition unconscious of itself. The new school saw in the Gospels an individual work, an invention of the Evangelist Mark, made with reflection. The hypothesis of Strauss, says M. Bruno-Bauer,<sup>2</sup> is mysterious, for it is tautological. To explain evangelical history by tradition is to compel one to explain tradition itself, and to find for it an anterior base. The method of Strauss is embarrassing and

<sup>1</sup> Strauss, *Die christliche Glaubenslehre*. Tübingen, 1840-44, i. p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> *Kritik der Evangelischen Geschichte de Synoptiker und des Johannes*. Leipzig, vols. i. and ii., 1841, vol. iii., 1842.



orthodox, and it ought to be so. Criticism has, in the writing of Strauss, given up its last struggle with theology, everything remaining on theological ground. Every time the two foes are thus grappling one with the other, the conquered always makes the conqueror bend a little. Strauss had supposed that the New Testament rested upon the Old, and that the Jews at the epoch of Jesus had a Christology complete, a Messianic type agreed on, from which the character of Jesus would have been copied, feature by feature. M. Bauer maintains, on the contrary, that all the acts by which they show Jesus as accomplishing the Messianic ideal, and the ideal itself, are the inventions of the first Christians. The Jews, according to him, had not at that time any strictly formulated ideal of Christ; the history of Jesus has not been an ideal creation formed upon traditional types. The Gospels, in a word, are Christian works, and not Judaic, as Strauss would have it. It is not Judaism which has lent the Messianic ideal to Christianity; it is, on the contrary, the appearance and the development of the Christian principle, the struggle between the Church and the Synagogue, which have familiarised the Jews with the idea of the Messiah, and have made of that faith the foundation of their religious system.<sup>1</sup>

As to the historic Christ, says M. Bauer, who does not see that what is said about him belongs to the ideal, and has no connection with the real world? If there had been a man to whom we could attribute the extraordinary revolution which has moved the world for eighteen centuries, we can at least affirm that he would not have been confined in the narrow mould of the evangelical Christ. The evangelical Christ, considered as an historic phenomenon, is entirely beyond us. . . . He is not born like a man; he does not live like a man; he does not die like a man. It is sheer waste of trouble to criticise or apologise

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i. p. 416.

for his acts ; for since he is placed outside the conditions of humanity, he ought not to care for the laws of human nature. More than that, this nature ought to be boldly denied by him. Hence this contrast between the human and the divine, which is the foundation of evangelical morality, and of which M. Bauer endeavours to follow the (according to him) fatal trace through all the history of Christian worship. We do not wish to say anything which may cause the work of M. Bauer to be taken more seriously than it deserves. We have sought in it in vain for that grand character of elevation and calm which constitutes the beauty of M. Strauss's book.

The blasphemy is conceivable, and almost excusable, by the epochs when, science not being free, the thinker revenges himself on the shackles to which he has to submit by an ironical respect and by secret indignation. But we do not believe that M. Bauer has suffered enough persecution to give him the right to use the declamatory tone he sometimes adopts. Complete independence for the critic is, as far as the rest is concerned, the best remedy for such errors. When the historian of Jesus shall be as free in his estimations as the historians of Buddha and Mahomet, he will not think of injuring those who do not think as he does. M. Eugene Bournouf has never exhibited anger against the authors of the fabulous life of Sakya Mouni, nor have any of the modern historians of Islamism shown any violent spite against Abulfeda and the Mussulman authors who have written, whilst truly believing, the biography of their prophet.

#### IV.

Has Israelitish tradition anything to teach us concerning Jesus ? Assuredly nothing authentic, and this is not one of the least surprising peculiarities of this mysterious



history, that absolute silence should be preserved by contemporaneous documents, whether Jewish or profane, upon an event which has become colossal for the future.<sup>1</sup> The appearance of Christianity seems to have been a circumstance hardly felt in the midst of Judaism; it had no resound, did not excite any reaction, and no remembrance of it remained. The Talmud, which sums up the whole intellectual movement of Judaism at the time of which we speak, does not contain a trace appreciable with certainty of even the indirect influence of Christ.<sup>2</sup> But in the Middle Ages, when the Church stood as a formidable foe before the Synagogue, it was necessary to have a system for this strange co-religionist which had arrived at such an incomparable destiny. From thence there is an odd legend which, as we understand it, cannot be friendly.<sup>3</sup> If the Church anathematised those innovators who dared in her face to form religious societies which did not menace her existence, what would she say to the Synagogue, who, in addition to the crime of heresy, had been the chief of her persecutors?

When modern criticism was introduced among the Israelites, the enlightened men of Judaism ought to have been more curious than ever to construct a historic theory upon the origins of Christianity and upon the person of Jesus. In some respects they would have been better judges than the Christians; in others, they were liable to exception. But indeed, if we except the illustrious Moses Mendelssohn, and some independent philosophers who

<sup>1</sup> The passages of the historian Josephus relative to Jesus and the first Christians are, in the opinion of the most able critics, interpolations, or at least have been retouched by a Christian hand.

<sup>2</sup> To understand the force of this circumstance, we must consider the profound action which the appearance of Protestantism has exercised upon Catholicism. There is scarcely a Catholic writer after the Reformation who does not feel the rebound of this great schism.

<sup>3</sup> See the *Bibliotheca Judaica Ante-Christiana* of Rossi (Parma, 1800, in 8vo), pp. 64, 94, 114, 121.

belonged rather to the human mind in general than to any particular sect, the thinkers of the Israelitish religion have not been able to free themselves from the charge of partiality, and often even of ill-humour, against the founder of Christianity. Not only have they not allowed to pass as easily as ourselves that which idealises Jesus—that may be understood—but too often they have shown delight in seeking isolated features of the evangelical doctrine in the books of the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> Mean enough criticism; for we can show in detail all the maxims of the Gospel in Moses and the Prophets; and I will still maintain that there is in the doctrine of Christ a new spirit and an original stamp. If a religion consists in a certain number of dogmatic propositions, and a morality in some few aphorisms, it might perhaps be true to say that Christianity is only Judaism. But the fundamental principles of morality being for the most part simple and for all time, there is no room for discovery in this order of truths; originality is there reduced to a sentiment more or less delicate. But when we put before us the Gospels and the sentences of the Rabbins contemporary with Jesus as collected in the *Pirkewoth*, and compare the impressions which result from these two books, the success elsewhere is here a decisive criterion: the Gospels have converted, whilst it is very doubtful whether the sentences of the Rabbins would have had in themselves sufficient efficacy for that.

The book of M. Salvador<sup>2</sup> is the most elevated expression of Jewish criticism relating to the life of Jesus. The subject is broadly conceived; the form is more free and finer than the writings of Strauss and the German exegetes. It is no longer a painful controversy with a

<sup>1</sup> See further a work, published in several numbers of the *Archives Israelitiques* (1849), by the learned Dukes, upon this question, "What is it that Christianity has taken from Judaism?"

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus Christ et sa Doctrine*. 2 vols. Paris, 1838.



theologian; it is an endeavour to explain the origins of Christianity, like any other great fact of the human mind, from the point of view of disinterested science. Unhappily the author, who deserves a distinguished rank as a philosopher and as a writer, leaves something to be desired on the score of erudition and historic criticism. M. Salvador has only searched into Judaism; he does not seem to have known the immense exegetical works of Germany upon the books of the Old and New Testament—works which have made such a complete revolution in the science of Hebraic antiquities. If he is thoroughly master of the Bible, Philo, and the Talmud, he makes but little use of the Apocrypha of Jewish and Christian origin; so, too, as regards the first Christian writers.

When we pass from reading M. Strauss to M. Salvador, we are struck with the contrast of the German critic, subtle, light, and always suspicious of reality, with the other too confident critic, who accepts without discussion all the narratives of the past. M. Salvador has no susceptibility for the delicate laws which control the formation of great legends—laws which must be studied in their very diverse applications in order to understand them thoroughly. The Gospels are for him a history intermingled with some marvellous incidents; he treats them a little like Rollin and the old school treated Titus Livius, discussing as real facts the circumstances of the birth of Jesus, of the flight into Egypt, &c. It is only in the narrative of the Passion that he admits there is any artificial arrangement, and there he recognises the intention to represent the ideal sufferings which have excited, according to the Messianic interpretation, the lamentations of the prophets. This part of the evangelical descriptions, he says, has much less of the character of history than of poetry or the drama; it neglects to suit the circumstances to the conditions of time and place, and it sacrifices all the

secondary personages, whether they be real or invented, to the dominant idea of the subject and to the highest personage. Then he shows how two of the principal actors of the Passion, Pilate and Barabbas, have seen their characters distorted for the purposes of the legend.<sup>1</sup> M. Salvador has here kept close to the mythical explanation, but without perceiving it, and otherwise guided by an interested view, which he does not disguise—that of clearing his co-religionists from the dishonourable part which the Evangelists make them play in the Passion. After that, M. Salvador always regards himself as in clear history. If he does not believe that Jesus left documents under his own hand upon his life and his history (he would not have been, however, much astonished<sup>2</sup>), he admits at least an oral tradition from the first disciples as having a strict value. If Strauss doubts too much, it is certain that M. Salvador doubts too little. The primitive facts of great religious phenomena, passing in the spontaneous region of the human mind, do not leave any trace. Religions do not recall their infancy any more than does the individual man; conscience does not commence for the living being until he is already adult and developed, that is to say, when the primitive facts have disappeared for ever.

As to the question of the doctrinal origins of Christianity, M. Salvador has treated it in a generally satisfactory manner. All the antecedents of Christianity are, in his eyes, to be found in Judaism, modified by the East since the Captivity and by Greece since Alexander. Judaism is like the egg in which the new religion is first formed and nourished before it appears in full light and lives its own life. Greece could not have had any effect upon Jesus but by the indirect influence it had exercised upon Judaism—

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus Christ et sa Doctrine*, vol. ii. chap. ix.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 169.



influence which we must not exaggerate in what concerns the Judaism of Palestine.

There is hardly any considerable element in primitive Christianity which is not to be found in Philo, among the Essenians, or in the orthodox doctrine of the Synagogue. The fundamental idea of the new-born sect—to rally round Abraham the whole race of Adam—the idea which includes the secret of Christian proselytism, and consequently all the destiny of the Church—is to be found in the treatise *De Nobilitate*, where Philo, as a philosopher and as a Christian, develops for the first time this truth, that nobility arises from individual virtue, and not from the blood of Abraham.

The question of the wonder-working arts and of miracles in general, that of the miracle of the resurrection in particular, the part of Simon the magician, and some other episodes, are treated by M. Salvador with much skill and reason. The criticism of the narrative of the Passion is above all remarkable for the precision which the author has brought to bear on it, by the boldness of the views he displays, and the singular controversy which he connects with it. In his work upon the institutions of Moses and the Hebrew people, M. Salvador has already attempted the apology of the Jewish council which condemned Jesus. According to him, the Sanhedrim could only have applied the existing laws. Jesus himself had sought death, and hence, regarding him as a citizen (such being necessarily the point of view taken by the Jews), he deserved it. The interest of the religious purity of history requires us to repeat under all forms that the Christian school is in no wise acceptable when it has brought that which regards the supreme council of the Jews into this solemn conflict to a question of low jealousy, to a matter of jurisdiction; when it has overwhelmed the Jewish nation, to whom it owes its birth, and whose finest ornaments it appropriates,

under the pretext of a voluntary crime which their ancestors might have committed in pronouncing against Jesus a judgment which had beforehand been announced and provoked, according to the whole theory of the Master in the fulfilment of the Scriptures. In that, the whole school of Christianity, Nazarene or Galilean, has given incontestable evidence to the world that it carries with it the characteristic signs of a sect and a party; it has given proof that its mission, even in its most legitimate, happiest splendour, only offers but one specialty; it has given the proof at last that the universal judgment of things and men, the reign of God of the prophets, of the God of truth, without iniquity, does not belong exclusively either to the period, more or less prolonged, of his proofs, or to the depth of his nature.<sup>1</sup>

The scandal which affected some strict minds when M. Cousin, in one of his wittiest fancies, dared to undertake the defence of the tribunal which condemned Socrates, to maintain that Anytus was a respectable citizen, the Areopagus an equitable and moderate tribunal, and that if we ought to be surprised at anything, it is that Socrates should have been accused so late, and should not have been condemned by a larger majority; this scandal, I say, was nothing in comparison with what M. Salvador raised in pleading for Caiaphas and the Sanhedrim, condemned for ever so long by the Christian conscience. It was on the occasion when M. Dupin the elder undertook, in the *Gazette des Tribunaux*, the revision of the process of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> None of the grounds were left out by the pen of the liberal advocate upon which the judgment would have been quashed on appeal: hired disturbers of the peace, fraud, *brigade grise*, individual liberty violated without warrant, sequestration of persons, captious interrogatories,

<sup>1</sup> *Jesus Christ et sa Doctrine*, vol. ii. pp. 168-169.

<sup>2</sup> *Jesus devant Caïphe et Pilate*. Paris, 1828.



functions of accuser and judge combined in the same person, encroachment by the executive upon the judicial power. For ourselves, may God preserve us from issuing another opinion upon such a question than that of Jesus himself: "*It must be that the Son of man should die!*" Without that he would not have represented the ideal of the wise, odious to the superstitious as to the politician, and paying for his moral beauty with his life. A vulgar death to crown the life of Jesus! What blasphemy! As to searching into that which passed in the soul of those who condemned him, it is a vain and barren question, even if it would not be insoluble. Who knows if he is worthy of love or of hatred? who can analyse what passes in the depth of his heart? He who says, like Caiaphas, "It is expedient that one man should die for the people," is certainly a detestable politician, and, however sad to say, he may have been an honest man. More than once history has shown both persecutors and persecuted to be right at the same time, and doubtless in the life eternal the persecuted will thank the persecutors for having by suffering procured them the seal of perfection.

## V.

If, renouncing the habit of mind which makes us familiar with the marvellous, we reflect upon the destiny of the revealers whom the religious conscience has raised above humanity, we shall be struck with astonishment, and we shall understand why, the objects of a fanatical love and hatred, they are so late in attaining their true place in history, that which they deserve in the eyes of the critic. A thousand motives of respect and timidity hinder rational discussion from being freely exercised respecting them, and in the end make their position in reference to science more unfavourable than advantageous.

They seemed to be placed under the ban of humanity, and the silence which is preserved in regard to them creates an illusion as to the importance of their part. A history of philosophy, where Plato would occupy a volume, ought, it seems, to devote two to Jesus; and yet there is more than one history of philosophy in which this latter name does not once appear. Such is the fate of all those who have attained religious consecration. How much has the body of *Hebraic literature*, for example, not suffered in the eyes of science and taste by becoming the Bible! It may be ill-humour, it may be a relic of faith, but the scientific and literary critic has some trouble to expect when making, the works which have been so sequestered for the profit of theology, a part of his domain. The author of that charming little poem which they call the *Canticle of the Canticles*, could he doubt but that one day it would be drawn from the company of Anacreon in order to make of it an inspiration which only sang of divine love? It is quite time that science should be accustomed to take the good wheresoever she finds it. The old philosophy, which seemed to accord to theologians that religions constitute an order apart, with which science has no concern, was brought to regard them in their turn as enemies raised by a rival power. In becoming more bold they will become more respectful; for how could reason be severe or disdainful towards one of the products of the human mind from the moment it is recognised in all these products without distinction or antithesis?

When criticism has been firmly fixed at this point of view of all the problems of history, Jesus will appear to it as the most extraordinary, and those will appear excusable who, overcome with so much mystery, have proclaimed him to be God: those at least have understood it, if not explained. Strange destiny—just to touch the wonders of the world of spirits with the finger—that an obscure man



(orthodoxy itself does not forbid us to use this word), the author of the greatest revolution that has ever changed the face of humanity, should become the joint to two leaves of history, loved almost to madness, assailed almost to fury, so well that there is not a degree on the moral scale on which he has not been placed! Emerged from a little district, very exclusive as to nationality, and very provincial as to mind, he has become the universal ideal. Athens and Rome have adopted him; the barbarians have fallen at his feet; rationalism dare not look at him at all fixedly except while on its knees before him. Yes, so he has been. His fortune has been more astonishing than even himself.

Those who circumscribe the powers of the human mind within the narrow limits of good common sense, those who have no conception of the proud originality of spontaneous creations of the conscience, should, in handling such a problem, restrict themselves to applying it to a convenient solution of the supernatural. In order to understand Jesus, we ought to be callous to the miracles; we ought to raise ourselves above our age of reflection and slow analysis, so as to contemplate the faculties of the soul in this state of fruitful and artless liberty, where, disdainful of our painful combinations, they attain their objects without regarding it themselves. Then this was the age of psychological miracles. To have recourse to a supernatural intervention to explain circumstances which have become impossible in the actual state of the world, this is to prove that we ignore the hidden forces of spontaneity. The more we search into the origins of the human mind, the more we shall understand that the miracle is only the unexplained; that in order to produce the phenomena of primitive humanity, we have no need of a God always immersed in the progress of things, and that these phenomena are the regular development of immutable laws like reason and perfection.

Certainly we must despair at ever arriving at a complete understanding of the wonderful apparitions for want of documents; much more so that their mysterious nature is for ever covered by an eternal obscurity. In the solution of problems of an order so elevated, the supernatural hypothesis and the very simple natural hypotheses (those of the eighteenth century for instance), where everything is reduced to the proportions of an ordinary case of imposture or credulity, ought equally to be rejected. A definitive analysis of Jesus is proposed to me, beyond which there would not be anything to seek which I could object to. His splendour would be the best proof of his insufficiency. The essential here is not to explain everything, but to convince that with more teaching everything could be explained.

But it is that which study, compared with religion and literature, shows superabundantly for the initiated mind to the process of criticism. The East has never known the purely intellectual greatness which has no need of miracles. It cares little for a learned man who is not a wonder-worker;<sup>1</sup> it has never attained to perfect brightness of conscience;<sup>2</sup> it has always seen Nature and history with the eyes of a child. A child instinctively jumbles his impressions with the narrative; he does not know how to isolate the matters of judgment which he has carried away from the personal manner with which he has regarded them; he does not relate the facts, but the imaginations which have come

<sup>1</sup> When the Arabs had adopted Aristotle as the great master of science, they made for him a miraculous legend as for a *prophet*. They pretended that he had been carried off to heaven in a column of fire, &c.

<sup>2</sup> China, endowed with an instinct so clear and so positive of the finite, ought always to be excepted when the East is mentioned. These people are the least supernaturalist, and there lies the secret of their mediocrity. It is fine not to dream always, like India, but to have dreamed in one's infancy: there remains in it a perfume, and like a tradition of poetry which pleases age, when we imagine no longer.



with the facts, or rather he recounts himself. Every fable which smiles upon his caprice is accepted by him; he improvises them again himself, and then he affirms them. Such was the state of the human mind in the artless epochs. The legend was born of itself and without any fallacious premeditation: as soon as it was born, so soon it was accepted; it went on increasing like a ball of snow; no criticism was there to control it. It is fair to remark, indeed, that the miracle did not then appear as being supernatural. The miracle was the usual thing, or rather there were no laws of nature for men, strangers to our ideas of experimental science, who saw everywhere the immediate action of free agents. The ideas of the laws of Nature only appeared later on, and are only intelligible to cultivated minds.

At the present day the simple-minded admit miracles with extreme facility. It is not, then, only in the origin of the human mind that the imagination allows itself to be overcome by the charms of the marvellous. Legendary fecundity lasts until the approach of the scientific age, only governed more and more, in diminishing its power, by the trouble of the reality.<sup>1</sup>

The application of these principles to Palestine is easily foreseen. The Jewish people, above all after the Babylonian captivity, were possessed of the idea of the Messiah, at first vague, indecisive, disappearing at times, but reappearing always more energetic and more decided. They caught a glimpse of him from the first as a Saviour who should restore the Temple and his country, as a model king, made up from the remembrances of David and Solomon, who should make Israel the centre of the world. Then, when cruel humiliations compelled this astonishing

<sup>1</sup> See the fine analysis of the faith in miracles given by M. Littré in the preface to the 12th edition of the translation of the *Life of Jesus* and in the *Revue de Deux Mondes*, 15th February 1856.

little people to recognise their material weakness, the type of the liberator became complicated with the prophet, suffering, and victim. He is no more the perfect king only, surrounded with an aureole of glory and wisdom; but the man of sorrow, dying and triumphing by his death.

Do we understand what action such an image, bred during the ages and resuming all its aspirations, would exercise upon the ardent faith of a people who lived only in the future? If it be true, as ancient physiology believed, that a woman pregnant with a child carries it stamped with her desires and her thoughts, why should not an idea as persistent be produced in the fruitful bosom of Israel? This long gestation of six or seven centuries ought to produce its fruit. And indeed, when the Roman domination had finished by placing the Jewish nation in the state of exaltation which produced extraordinary phenomena, the signs of the times manifested themselves everywhere. We could have seen, or at least have studied, very near and at the original sources the intellectual state of the Jews at this epoch. The marvels of the Gospels are only the most sober good sense if we place them alongside the apocryphas of Jewish origin and the Talmud. Must we be surprised that, in the midst of a movement so strange, we have seen reappear in some shape or other the prodigies of the first days of humanity, and one of those profound manifestations, the generation of which escapes the observer who is not raised above the experience of the vulgar?

Let us draw a veil over these mysteries that reason itself dare not sound the depth. It is not in a few pages that we can endeavour to solve the most obscure problem in history. The critical sense is not inoculated in an hour. He who has not been cultivated by a long scientific and intellectual education will always find prejudicial reasons to oppose to the most delicate inductions. To elevate and cultivate the mind, to vulgarise the grand results of natural and



philological science, are the only means of making the new ideas of the critic understood and accepted. To those who have not the necessary preparation, these ideas can only appear as false and dangerous subtleties.

Permit me to give one example: the four Canonical Gospels often relate the same facts under the same circumstances with somewhat considerable variations. This is explained in all the rationalistic hypotheses, for it ought not to be more difficult for the Gospels than for historical or legendary narratives of other religions, which oftentimes offer contradictions even stronger still. But it is not so in the supernatural hypothesis of inspiration. There is nothing there for the Holy Ghost; one thing cannot pass by two methods at once. See here a decided objection in the eyes of the independent critic. However, it is not possible for orthodoxy absolutely to agree to this. If the circumstances of the different narratives are not absolutely irreconcilable, it will say that one of the texts has preserved certain details omitted by the other, and it will put at the end the diverse circumstances, at the risk of making the narrative altogether incoherent. If the circumstances are decidedly contradictory, it will say that the fact related is double or triple, although in the eyes of a sound critic the different narrators had evidently the same event in their minds. It is thus that the narratives of John and the Synoptics (under this collective name we mean to include Matthew, Mark, and Luke) on the last entry of Jesus into Jerusalem being irreconcilable, the harmonists suppose that he entered twice, step by step, and under almost the same identical circumstances. It is thus that the three denials of St. Peter, related differently by the four Evangelists, constitute in the eyes of the orthodox eight or nine different denials, although Jesus only predicted three. The circumstances of the Resurrection furnish analogous difficulties, to which they oppose like solutions. What

can we say to such an exegesis? Does it involve a metaphysical impossibility? No! We vainly endeavour to reduce to silence those who would maintain it; but however little developed it may be to the critical sense, they will reject it as something contrary to the rules of interpretation which we follow on every other subject. We must appreciate in the same way the answers which the apologists make to the difficulties arising from the silence which the Evangelists, particularly the fourth, preserve upon leading circumstances or upon entire episodes. It is only, they say, a *negative argument*, from which we can conclude nothing. But shall we reason thus in profane matters? and is it not from these kinds of argument that the true critic often draws his most solid deductions?<sup>1</sup>

To require that orthodoxy should apply the same criticism to the sacred books as to the profane, is to require that which it will not agree to. On the other side, to challenge a contest on this ground is to forsake one's duty in the discussion. See, why it is that all controversy between persons who believe in the supernatural and those who do not so believe is utterly fruitless. We must speak of miracles as Schliermacher spoke of angels; we cannot prove their impossibility. However, all our

<sup>1</sup> The end of *non-recevoir* that the theologians oppose to the *argument negatif* is entirely characteristic of scholastic and juridical habits, which they substitute for ingenuity, the only faculty which should find the truth in history. To make, for example, the age of institutions or prescriptions to be relatively modern where the theologian is compelled to insist on great antiquity, the critic draws a very solid deduction from the silence of all historic documents anterior to a certain epoch. Can the theologian say, How do you know that these institutions did not exist although they may not have been mentioned? Doubtless! Who is it who proves that organised mysteries did not exist in Homeric times if the Iliad and the Odyssey did not speak of them? What is it proves that our political and judiciary institutions did not exist under the Merovingians if the historians of the day do not speak of them? It is the same with all historic results expressed under the form of negation.



conception is such that they could no longer be born in our time: they belong exclusively to the idea that antiquity dates from the world. It is not reasonable that this should be the result of the whole of modern science; there is no supernatural.<sup>1</sup> Since there has been a being, all that has passed in the world in the way of phenomena has been the regular development of the laws of that being—laws which constitute the sole order of government and nature, whether physical or moral. Whoever says above or beyond nature in the order of facts, says a contradiction, like as if he should say *super-divine* in the order of substances. In rejecting the miracle, M. Littré<sup>2</sup> well says, the present age has not acted deliberately on purpose, for it had received the tradition of it with that of ancestors, always so dear and so preserved, but without wishing it, without seeking for it, and by the sole fact of the development of which it was the border. An experience that nothing ever comes from contradicting him has taught us that he who relates the miraculous has constantly its origin in his imagination as he was struck, in complaisant credulity and in ignorance of natural laws. Whatever research we may have made, there never was a miracle produced where it could be observed and verified.

Human things obeying laws more difficult to lay hold of than those of inanimate nature, the notion of a supernatural intervention defends itself with more advantage. We should have long ceased to believe in the physical miracle, but that Jesus still remains a psychological miracle. We cannot understand how the contemporary of Hillel and of Shammai, perhaps their brother according to the spirit, how the same sap had produced the Talmud parallel with the Gospels, the most singular monument of intel-

<sup>1</sup> I prove the need, in order to get rid of all misunderstanding, by recalling here the explanation I have given upon this word in p. 97, note 1.

<sup>2</sup> Preface of the 12th edition of the *Vie de Jesus*, p. v.

lectual aberration and the highest creation of the moral sense. When all is done, however, this explains itself. An epoch, provided it happens among the vulgar, may give rise to the most contrary phenomena. Has not the same revolution proclaimed at the same time the formula of civil rights, which seem destined to be the law of the future, and terrified the world with scenes of horror? We ought to consider everything in the great crises of the human spirit. It is only the productions of epochs of calm and repose which are consistent with themselves. The appearance of Christ would be inconceivable in a logical and regular centre; it was only natural in the strange storm which passed over the human mind in Judea at the time of which we speak. A more extended view of the philosophy of history would lead one to see that the true causes of Jesus ought not to be sought for outside humanity, but in the midst of the moral world; that the laws which have produced Jesus are not exceptional and transitory laws, but the permanent laws of the human conscience applied under extraordinary circumstances, when sublimity and folly simultaneously appeared; somewhat like geology, after having, in order to explain the revolutions of the globe, for a long time had recourse to causes different from those which they apply to-day, returns to explain that the actual laws are sufficient to bring about the revolutions; that the same circumstances being reproduced, the same phenomena will reappear; and, in spite of the apparent exhaustion of the creative powers of nature, we shall yet see a new spirit spontaneously produced, without perhaps personifying itself in so exclusive a manner in such and such an individual.

Strauss, then, has only enunciated one of the most decided principles of the moral mind when he declares as non-historic, at least so far as the letter is concerned,



every narrative where the laws of nature are violated, and when he proclaims that the absolute cause never intervenes by exceptional acts in the concatenation of finite causes. Let us not search for the dignity of Jesus in the country of the chimera. What! says Strauss, shall we attach to some cures performed in Galilee a higher importance than to the miracles of moral life and the history of the world, which are shown in the ever-increasing power of man over nature, and in the irresistible power which the ideal incessantly exercises over matter? What particular interest, then, attaches to an isolated fact, which has no other value than as symbolically representing this eternal movement? Strange thing! that which constitutes the greatness of Jesus in the eyes of his contemporaries and of his first worshippers is for us a stain upon the ideal, a feature by which this ideal loses its universality in order to take a particular colouring from his epoch and his country. Who does not suffer at seeing the magician by the side of the sublime moralist; to find in the Gospels, by the side of the Sermon on the Mount and the discourse at the Supper, narratives of persons possessed with devils, who, if they had been born in our days, would have been met with a smile or with incredulity?

It is not possible to separate strictly the historic Christ from the evangelical Christ, the real personage who has borne the name of Jesus from the ideal personage who results from the Gospels. But when we affirm that Jesus passed his youth in Galilee; that he did not receive any Hellenic training; that he made some journeys to Jerusalem, where his imagination was strongly impressed, and where he came into communication with the spirit of his nation; that he preached a doctrine hardly orthodox with regard to the Judaism of the Scribes—a doctrine impressed perhaps with some provincial tendency (Galilee had a bad repute for orthodoxy as also for purity of language); that

the strict Jews opposed him strongly, because his high moral tendency disquieted and went beyond them; that they succeeded in putting him to death after an almost triumphant entry which had been awarded him by his fellow-countrymen who had come with him to Jerusalem to the Feast of the Passover—one had said nothing which the most severe historian could refuse to accept. It is permitted to recognise that there had been upon the life of Jesus a legendary work analogous to that of every poem—a work by means of which a real hero becomes an ideal type—without denying the high personality of the sublime and truly Divine Founder of the Christian faith. Strauss himself recognises that there is a history under the legend, but he has not proclaimed it loudly enough, because his theological habits showed him an easier system of interpretation in the mythological hypothesis taken in its most absolute sense.

Let us ask, without answering questions which can only hinder the critic, and on which he can never arrive at a satisfactory conclusion, up to what point are the doctrine and moral character which the Gospels attribute to Christ historically the doctrine and moral character of Jesus? Was Jesus really a heavenly and original man, or a Jewish sectary analogous to John the Baptist? Was he conscious of what he was and what he would become? Does Jesus seem to us free from human weakness because only we see him from a distance and through a legendary mist? Is it not because the means are wanting for criticism that he appears to us in history as the sole irreproachable being? If we touch him, like Socrates, shall we not find also some earthly clay at his feet? Here, as in all other religious creations, the admirable, the celestial, do they not become the right of humanity? I do not ignore the fact that the critic who distrusts individuals and preserves himself from them has a very great part; he thinks



that it is the popular mass which almost always creates the beauty of the men elevated to the honours of apotheosis; he hesitates to express his admiration for persons of whom science can affirm nothing; he remembers the great disproportion which exists between the real part taken by persons who create religious foundations and their destiny beyond the tomb. St. Peter, a fisherman of Galilee, has reigned over the world for more than a thousand years; Mary, a humble woman of Nazareth, has risen by successive and ever-endearing hyperbole to the very bosom of the Trinity! We say boldly that it never was chance which designated this individual for idealisation. The part of the Gospels which contains the most historic circumstances is that of the Passion and the death; but this part is where Jesus appears with the most grandeur. There is no one who, in reading these admirable pages, where the world has found such a high lesson of morality, but must feel the immediate reflex of a grand soul, and place the touching and august sufferer of Calvary among those whom death has consecrated. Doubtless the course in which humanity retains certain characteristics, differs almost entirely from the primitive reality, but we cannot deny, on the other side, that works speak higher than any documents, and that if history is compelled to measure the glory of individuals by the luminous or beneficial trace which they have left in the world, it ought not to find any exaggeration in the incomparable brightness with which the religious conscience of human nature has surrounded the face of Jesus.

The philosopher as well as the theologian ought then to recognise in Jesus two natures, to separate the human from the divine, and not confound in his adoration the real hero and the ideal. We must without hesitation adore Christ, that is to say, the character resulting from the Gospels; for all that is sublime participates in the divine, and the evan-

gelical Christ is the most beautiful incarnation of God in the most beautiful of forms. He is the moral man; he is really the Son of God and the Son of Man, God in man. Those grand interpreters of Christianity do not deceive themselves who make him out to be born without father here below, and attribute his generation not to a natural intercourse, but to a virginal bosom and a celestial operation. Admirable symbol, which conceals under its wings the true explanation of the ideal Christ! What does it matter to the Man of Galilee that the reflection of the divinity is taken from him almost before our eyes? Assuredly the historian ought to wish to clear up such a problem, but at the bottom the moral and religious necessities of man are but little interested in it. Eh! what does it matter to us that it is eighteen hundred years since these things happened in Palestine? What does it matter to us that Jesus was born in such and such a village; that he had such or such ancestors; that he suffered on such or such a day in the sacred week? Let us leave these questions to the researches of the curious. Would the Homeric poems be more beautiful if it were proved that the circumstances they recited were all true facts? Would the Gospels be more beautiful if it were true that at a certain point of space and time a man had realised to the letter the features they present to us? The picture of a sublime character gains nothing by its conformity with a real hero. The truly admirable Jesus is under the shelter of the historic critic; he has his throne in the conscience. He will not be replaced except by a superior ideal; He is king for a long time yet. What do I say? His beauty is eternal; his reign will have no end. The Church has been surpassed; she has surpassed herself: Christ has not been surpassed. Whilst one noble heart shall aspire to moral beauty—whilst but one noble soul shall start for joy before the realisation of the divine, Christ will have



his adorers for the truly immortal part of his being; for we do not deceive ourselves, and we do not stretch the limits of the imperishable. In the evangelical Christ one part will die—that is the local and national; it is the Jew, the Galilean; but one part will remain—that is the great master of morality; that is the just man persecuted; that is he who has said to man, “You are the son of the same Heavenly Father.” The wonder-worker and the prophet shall die; the man and the wise one shall remain; or rather, eternal beauty shall live for ever under the sublime name, like as all those whom Humanity has chosen in order to recall to herself what she is, and become fond of her own image. Behold the living God! Behold that which we must adore!

## MAHOMET AND THE ORIGINS OF ISLAMISM.

ALL origins are obscure, religious origins more so than others. Religions being the products of the spontaneous instincts of human nature, do not recall their infancy any more than the adult recalls the history of his first age and the successive phases of the development of his conscience. Mysterious chrysalids, they only appear in the full light of day, in the perfect maturity of their forms. It is with the origins of religions as it is with the origin of humanity. Science demonstrates that on a certain day, by virtue of natural laws which have governed the development of things without exception or external intervention, the thinking being made its appearance, endowed with all its faculties and perfect as to its essential elements; and however we may wish to explain the appearance of man upon the earth by the laws which have governed the phenomena of our globe since Nature has ceased to create, it will only be to open the door to imaginations so extravagant that no serious mind would wish to consider it for a moment. It is still undoubted that on a certain day man, by the natural and spontaneous expansion of his faculties, improvised language, and this notwithstanding any image borrowed from the actual state of the human mind may not assist us to conceive this strange fact, now become entirely impossible in our age of reflection. We must even give up the explanation of the primitive facts of religion by any process open to experience—facts which have no analogues since humanity has lost its religious fecundity. In the face of the impotence of reflective reason to found belief



and reduce it to discipline, how can we fail to recognise the hidden force which at certain moments penetrates and vivifies the very entrails of humanity? The supernatural hypothesis perhaps offers the least difficulty among the frivolous solutions of those who have touched upon the problems of religious origins without having penetrated the mysteries of the spontaneous conscience; and if, in order to reject this hypothesis, we must arrive at a rational opinion upon so many truly divine facts, very few men would have the right to disbelieve the supernatural.

Would it be true that science ought to give up the explanation of the formation of the globe because the phenomena which have brought it to the state in which we see it are no longer produced on a large scale in our days? that she ought to give up the explanation of the appearance of life and living species because the contemporaneous period has ceased to be creative? the explanation of the origin of language because languages are no longer created? the origin of religions because religions are no longer created? No; certainly not. It is the work of science—infinitely delicate and often dangerous work—to guess the primitive by the faint traces it has left behind it. Reflection has not left us at such a distance from the creative age but that we can reproduce in ourselves the sentiment of spontaneous life. History, however niggard she may be for the non-perceptive epochs, is not, however, entirely dumb; she permits us, if not to touch directly upon questions of origin, at least to examine them from the outside. Then, as nothing is absolute in human affairs, and there are not two facts in the past which can strictly be entered in the same category, we have intermediary shades for representing the inaccessible phenomena for the purpose of immediate study. Geology finds in the slow disintegration of the actual state of the globe, data for the explanation of prior revolutions. The linguist, in assisting at the phenomena of the develop-

ment of languages which goes on under our eyes, is enabled to discover laws which have governed the formation of language. The historian wanting primitive facts which have heralded religious appearances can study the degeneration, the abortive attempts, the demi-religions, if I dare say so, showing, although in more reduced proportions, the process by which the great works of the unreflective epochs have been formed.

The birth of Islamism is on this account a unique and truly inappreciable fact. Islamism has been the last religious creation of humanity, and in many respects the least original. Instead of the mystery under which other religions enshroud their cradle, this one was born in full history; its roots are even with the soil. The life of its founder is as well known as that of the Reformers of the sixteenth century. We can follow year by year the fluctuations of his thoughts, his contradictions, his weaknesses. Elsewhere religious origins are lost in a dream; the work of the most delicate criticism scarcely suffices to distinguish the real under the deceitful appearance of the myth and the legend. Islamism, on the contrary, appearing in the midst of a very advanced reflection, is absolutely wanting in the supernatural. Mahomet, Omar, Ali are neither seers, nor illuminati, nor miracle-workers. Each one of them knows very well what he does; he is not the dupe of himself; each of them offers himself for analysis, stripped and with all the weaknesses of humanity.

Thanks to the excellent works of M. Weil<sup>1</sup> and Caussin de Perceval,<sup>2</sup> we can say that the problem of the origin of

<sup>1</sup> *Mohammed der Prophet, sein Leben und seine Lehre* (Stuttgart, 1843); *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (Biellfeld, 1844); *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner* (Frankfort, 1845); *Geschichte der Chalifen* (Mannheim, vol. i., 1846; vol. ii., 1848; vol. iii., 1851).

<sup>2</sup> *Essai sur l'Histoire des Arabes avant l'Islamisme pendant l'Epoque de Mahomet et jusqu'à la Réduction de toutes les Tribus sous la Loi Musulmane* (Paris, 1848, 3 vols.).



Islamism has reached in our time a nearly complete solution. M. Caussin de Perceval, moreover, has introduced a capital element into the question by the new teachings which he has provided upon the antecedents and the fore-runners of Mahomet—a delicate subject, which had scarcely been noticed before him. His excellent work will remain a model of this exact learning, solid and removed from all conjecture, which forms the characteristic of the French school. The delicacy and penetration of M. Weil ensure for his works on Islamism a distinguished rank. Under the circumstances of the choice and of the richness of the sources, his work is, however, inferior to that of our learned compatriot, and we may reproach him for placing too much confidence upon the Turkish and Persian authorities, which, on the present question, have but little value.

America and England have also been occupied with Mahomet. A well-known novelist, Washington Irving,<sup>1</sup> has related his life with interest, but without proof of a very elevated historical sentiment. His book, however, shows a true progress when we consider that in 1829 Mr. Charles Foster published two large volumes (very much relished by the clergy<sup>2</sup>) in order to establish that Mahomet was nothing but the Little Horn of the he-goat which figures in the 8th chapter of Daniel, and that the Pope was the Great Horn. Mr. Foster upon this ingenious parallel founds a whole philosophy of history, according to which the Pope represents the corruption of Western Christianity, and Mahomet the corruption of the East. Such are the striking resemblances of Mahometism and Papistry.

<sup>1</sup> *Lives of Mahomet and his Successors.* New York, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahometism Unveiled: an Inquiry in which that Arch-Heresy, its Diffusion and Continuance, are Examined on a New Principle, tending to Confirm the Evidences and Aid the Propagation of the Christian Faith.* This is the same Mr. Charles Foster who is the author of a hoax upon the Sinaitic inscriptions, in which he pretends to find the primitive language and writing, the primitive text of Exodus, &c.

It would be a curious history to write would that of the notions which Christian nations entertained respecting Mahomet, from the time of the narrative of the false Turpin about the golden idol which *Mahom* worshipped at Cadiz, and which Charlemagne did not dare to destroy for fear of the legion of devils enclosed in it, until the day when criticism restored in a very real sense to the father of Islamism, his title of prophet. The virgin faith of the first half of the Middle Ages had only the most vague notions of those modes of worship which were foreign to Christianity; it figured to itself Maphomet, Baphomet, Bafum<sup>1</sup> as a false god to which human sacrifices were offered. It was in the twelfth century that Mahomet began to pass as a false prophet, and then they thought seriously about exposing his imposture. The translation of the Koran by order of Peter the Venerable, the polemical works of the Dominicans and of Raymond Lully, the teaching of William of Tyre and Matthew Paris, contributed to spread abroad sounder notions of Islamism and its founder. To the idol Mahom succeeded the heresiarch Mahomet, placed by Dante in his Hell (xxviii. 31) in a fairly honourable region among the sowers of discord with Fra Dolcino and Bertrand de Born. There was a sign of revolution already operating in the conscience. In the epoch of truly artless faith, the faithful ignore the existence of any other faith than their own, or, if they know of the existence of other worships, these worships appear to them so impure and so ridiculous, that their votaries can only be in their eyes either mad or perverse. What astonishment for the consciences when they come to recognise at the side of the dogma, which they believed to be unique, there are others which also claim to come to heaven! The word of the Three Impostors, which had so much attention during the whole of the thirteenth cen-

<sup>1</sup> From thence, *bafumerie*, *mahomerie*, *momerie*, to denote all superstitious and impure modes of worship.



ture, and of which the popular imagination made a book, is the result of this first incredulity preceding the study of Arab philosophy and a sufficiently exact knowledge of Islamism.<sup>1</sup> The name of Mahomet thus became almost synonymous with impious; and when Orcagna, in the hell of the Campo Santo of Pisa, wished to represent by the side of the heretics the despisers of all religions, the three persons he chose were Mahomet, Averroes, and the Antichrist. The Middle Ages did not go half-way in their anger. Mahomet was at one and the same time a sorcerer, an infamous debauchee, a camel-thief, and a cardinal who, not having succeeded in becoming Pope, invented a new religion in order to revenge himself upon his colleagues. His biography became a catalogue of all imaginable crimes, to such an extent, that the *Histoires de Baphomet* became, like those of Pilate, a theme of obscene anecdotes.<sup>2</sup> The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not show much more justice: Bibliander, Hottinger, Maracci did not dare to take up the Koran except for the purpose of refuting it.<sup>3</sup>

Prideaux and Bayle at last regarded Mahomet as historians, and no longer as controversialists; but the want of authentic documents kept them discussing puerile fables, which until then had sufficed for the curiosity of the people and the anger of the theologians. The honour of the first attempt at a biography of Mahomet from Oriental sources

<sup>1</sup> I have exposed this more at length in my essay upon *Averroes et l'Averroïsme*, p. 222 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Roman de Mahomet*, published by MM. Reinaud and Fr. Michel (Paris, 1831), and Edel du Meril, *Poesies Populaire Latines du Moyen Age*, 1847, p. 367.

<sup>3</sup> We can judge of the force of their reasoning by what I have borrowed from the celebrated theologian Gènebrand: "Why is it, O Mahomet, that thou hast not written thy law or thy Koran in Latin, or Greek, or Hebrew, seeing that these are the languages known throughout all the Roman Empire and by the learned?" He answered, but very coldly, and after the manner of the Huguenots, that his Alcoran or institution was not for the Romans or the learned, because they should not be converted. But it was not for that, but because he was a stupid, and knew nothing of Hebrew, Greek, or Latin.

belongs to Gagnier. This savant was induced to learn from Abulfeda, which was very fortunate. We doubt whether in the eighteenth century the critics were sufficiently able to apprehend as they ought the difference as to the historic value of the narratives of the Arab historians and the legends emanating from the Persian imagination. This capital distinction, which M. Caussin de Perceval alone has well observed, is, to speak truly, the nucleus of all the problems which relate to the origins of Islamism. Composed from Arab sources, such as the biographies of Ibn Hischem and Abulfeda, the life of Mahomet is simple and natural, almost without miracles. Composed from Turkish and Persian authors, the same legend appears like a mass of absurd fable in the worst style. They did not commence to put the traditions of the life of Mahomet into order until the time of the Abbassides. The editors of that epoch already relied upon written sources, of which the authors, in citing their authorities, themselves referred back to the companions of the Prophet. Around the mosque adjoining the house of Mahomet, a bench reached all along, upon which men without family or dwelling made their resting-place. These men lived upon the generosity of the Prophet, and often ate with him. They were called the People of the Bench (*ahl el-soffa*); they were reputed to know a great deal of the personal peculiarities of Mahomet, and their recollections became the origin of innumerable *divers* or *hadith*. The Mussulman faith itself was alarmed at the multitude of documents thus obtained. Six legitimate sources were only recognised by tradition, and the indefatigable Bokhari avows that upon two hundred thousand *hadith* which he had collected seven thousand two hundred and twenty-five only appeared to him to be of incontestable authenticity. The European critic would assuredly, without incurring the reproach of rashness, proceed to an



elimination still more severe. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that these first narratives present us with many features of the real physiognomy of the Prophet, and may be clearly distinguished from the collections of pious legends imagined solely for the edification of readers. The true monument of the primitive history of Islamism, the Koran, remains otherwise absolutely unassailable, and this monument is sufficient, independently of the narratives of historians, to display Mahomet.

I have not seen in any literature a process of composition which can give an exact idea of the compilation of the Koran. It is neither a book written with a sequel, nor a vague indeterminate text approaching little by little to a definitive lesson, nor the compilation of the teaching of a master made from the recollections of his disciples; it is the collection of the sermons, and, if I dare say so, of the orders of the day of Mahomet, bearing still the date of the place where they were published and the trace of the circumstances which called them forth. Each of these pieces was written from the dictation of the Prophet,<sup>1</sup> upon skins, upon shoulder-blades of mutton, upon camel-bones, on polished stones, on leaves of the palm tree, or preserved in the memory of the principal disciples, whom they called the Bearers of the Koran. It was only under the Khalifat of Abu-Bekr, after the battle of Yemama, where a great number of old Mussulmans perished, that they thought of reuniting the Koran between two boards, and placing end to end the detached and often contradictory fragments. It is beyond doubt that this compilation, over which Zeyd-ben-Thabet, the most trusted secretary of Mahomet, presided, was made up in perfect good faith. No work of co-ordination or conciliation was attempted; they put at the head the longest portions, and they

<sup>1</sup> The word *koran* would say recitation, and does not disclose any idea analogous to that of *book* (Kitab) of the Jews and Christians.

reunited at the end the shortest *surates*,<sup>1</sup> which had only a few lines, and the pattern copy was intrusted to the care of Hafsa, the daughter of Omar, one of the widows of Mahomet. A second verification was made under the Khalifat of Othman. Some variances of orthography and dialect were introduced into the copies of the different provinces. Othman named a commission, always presided over by Zeyd, to constitute definitively the text according to the Mecca dialect. Then, by a procedure very characteristic of the Oriental critic, he collected and burned all the other copies, so as to put an end to all discussion. It is thus that the Koran has come down to us, without any very essential variations. Assuredly such a mode of composition is calculated to inspire some scruples. The integrity of a work intrusted for a long time to memory seems to us to be ill kept. Cannot alterations and interpolations slip into successive revisions? Some Mussulman heretics have upon this point forestalled the suspicions of the modern critic. M. Weil, at the present day, has maintained that the revision of Othman was not purely grammatical, as the Arabs would have it, and that policy had an influence, mainly to rebut the pretensions of Ali. However, the Koran is presented to us with but little arrangement, in very complete disorder, and with very flagrant contradictions: each of the fragments which compose it bears a complexion so distinct, that nothing could in a general way assail its authenticity. We have then for Islamism this immense advantage, the very pieces of its origin—pieces no doubt very suspicious, and expressing less truth of the circumstances than the needs of the moment, but in that respect, precious in the eyes of the critic who knows how to interpret them. It is upon this strange sight of a religion born in open daylight, with full consciousness of itself, that we desire to call for the moment, the attention of thinkers.

<sup>1</sup> This is the Arab name of the chapters of the Koran.



## I.

Criticism in general should forego the want of thorough knowledge of the character and biography of the founders of religion. In that respect the fabric of the legend has entirely covered that of history. Were they handsome or ugly, vulgar or sublime? No one knows. The books we ascribe to them, the discourses we preach of them, are in general more modern compositions, and we learn much less of what they really were than of the manner in which their disciples conceived their ideal. The beauty even of their character is not for them; it belongs to humanity, which has made them to its image. Transformed by this continually creative power, the ugliest caterpillar would become the most beautiful butterfly.

It is not so with Mahomet. The work of the legend has remained around him, weak and without originality. Mahomet is really a historic personage; we touch him in every part; the book which remains under his name represents, word for word, the discourses he held. His life is for good and all, a biography like any other, without prodigies and without exaggeration. Ibn Hisham and the most ancient of his historians are sensible writers. They are a little near the tone of the *Vie des Saints*, written in a devout but reasonable fashion; and yet we can cite twenty legends of saints—that of St. Francis d'Assisi for instance—which have become infinitely more mythical than that of the founder of Islamism.

Mahomet would not be a thaumaturgist; he wished to be a prophet, and a prophet without miracles. He constantly repeated that he was a man like any other—mortal as others were, subject to sin, and having need, as other men, of the mercy of God. In his latter days, wishing to allay his conscience, he ascended the pulpit. “Mussul-

mans," said he, "if I have struck any one of you, here is my back that he may strike me. If any one has been wronged by me, let him return injury for injury. If I have taken anybody's goods, all that I have is at his disposition." A man arose and claimed a debt of three drachmas. "I would much rather," said the Prophet, "have the shame in this world than in the other," and he paid him on the spot.

This extreme measure, this truly exquisite good taste with which Mahomet performed his part of prophet, was imposed upon him by the spirit of his nation. Nothing is more incorrect than to depict these Arabs before Islamism as a coarse, ignorant, and superstitious nation. We ought to say, on the contrary, that they were a refined, sceptical, and incredulous people. Here is a curious episode of the early days of Mahomet's mission, which shows the icy indifference which prevailed around him, and the extreme reserve he was required to observe with regard to the employment of the marvellous. He was seated in the open space in front of the Caaba, a short distance from a circle of several of the leading Koreishites, who were opposed to his doctrines. Otba the son of Rebia, one of them, came near and stood by his side, and, speaking in the name of the others, "Son of my friend," said he, "thou art a man distinguished by thy qualities and thy birth. Is it well thou dost bring disturbance in thy country, division among families, that thou dost outrage our gods, that thou chargest our ancestors and our wise men with impiety and error? But we wish to deal discreetly with thee. Listen to the proposals I have to make to thee, and consider if it will suit thee to accept some of them." "Speak," said Mahomet, "I listen to thee." "Son of my friend," replied Otba, "if the object of thy conduct be to acquire riches, we will assess everything for thee to make a fortune more considerable than that of any Koreishite. If



thou desirest honours, we will make thee our chief, and we will not adopt any resolution without thy advice. If thou canst not bear the influence of the spirit which appears to attach itself to thee and to control thy disposition, we will call in skilful physicians, and we will pay them to cure thee." "I am neither greedy of property, nor ambitious of dignity, nor possessed by an evil spirit," answered Mahomet; "I am sent by Allah, who has revealed to me a book, and has ordered me to announce to you the rewards and punishments which await you." "Ah! well, Mahomet," said the Koreishite, "since thou dost not agree to our proposals, and pretendest that thou art sent by Allah, give us some clear proofs of thy quality. Our valley is narrow and barren, ask that God may enlarge it, that he may remove the mountains which enclose it, that he may cause to flow through it rivers like the rivers of Syria and Irak, or that he will cause some of our ancestors to come out of the tomb, among them Cossay the son of Kilâb, the man whose word had so much weight, that these illustrious dead, being raised, may recognise thee as a prophet, and we will also recognise thee." "God," answered Mahomet, "has not sent me to you for that; he has sent me only to preach his law." "At least," rejoined the Koreishite, "pray to thy Lord that he will direct one of his angels to bear witness of thy truth, and order us to believe thee. Ask him also that he will show openly the choice he has made of thy person in relieving thee of the need to seek thy daily living in the markets like the least of thy fellow-countrymen." "No," said Mahomet, "I will not address to him these requests; my duty is only to preach to you." "Ah! well, let thy Lord make the heavens fall upon us, as thou pretendest he is able to do, for we will not believe thee."

One sees it, a Buddha, a son of God, a thaumaturge of high degree would be above the temperament of these people.

The extreme acuteness of the Arab mind, the frank and plain manner in which they regarded the real, the looseness of manners and belief which prevailed at the epoch of Islamism forbad grand airs on the part of the new prophet. Arabia is wanting completely in the element which engenders mysticism and mythology.<sup>1</sup> The Semitic nations, those at least who have remained faithful to patriarchal life and the ancient spirit, have never attributed to God, variety, plurality, or sex. The word "goddess" would be in Hebrew a most horrible barbarism. Hence this characteristic feature, they have never had either mythology or epics. The plain and simple fashion in which they conceived God, separated from the world, not engendering, not engendered, having no likeness, excluded those grand embellishments, those divine poems in which India, Persia, and Greece have developed their fantasies.

Mythology representing Pantheism in religion is only possible in the imagination of a people where the notions of God, of humanity, and the universe are allowed to fluctuate with uncertainty; but the mind farthest removed from Pantheism is most assuredly the Semitic mind. Arabia in particular had lost, or perhaps never had, the gift of supernatural invention. We scarcely find a religious thought in all the *Moallakât*,<sup>2</sup> and in the vast category of anti-Islamic poetry. This people had not the sense of holy things; but in return they had a very lively

<sup>1</sup> If it be objected that the general tendency of Oriental philosophy is towards mysticism, I would observe that it is only by the abuse of the term that one applies the name of *Arab philosophy* to a philosophy which has never been rooted in the Arabic peninsula, and the appearance of which has been a reaction of Persian genius against Arabic genius. This philosophy has been written in Arabic, that is all; it is not Arab either in tendency or spirit.

<sup>2</sup> The verses which had gained the prize in the poetic contests were called *Moallakât*, or Suspended, from being suspended with golden nails to the door of the Caaba. There are seven of them remaining, to which they generally attach two or three other poems of like character.



sentiment of finite things and of the passions of the human heart.

Thus we see why Mussulman legend, outside that of Persia, remains so meagre, and why the mythical element in it is absolutely nothing. Doubtless the life of Mahomet, like that of all great founders, is surrounded with fables; but these fables have received some sanction from the Shiahs, governed in their turn by the Persian imagination. So far from being attributable to the depths of Islamism, they ought only to be regarded as additional dross, tolerated rather than consecrated, and very analogous to the mythology of the low stage of the Apocryphal books, which the Church has never either frankly adopted or severely banned. How is it that the popular imagination had not surrounded an existence so extraordinary with some prodigies? How is it that the infancy, above all a theme so advantageous for the legend, had not tempted the story-tellers? To listen to these: on the night when the Prophet was born, the palace of Chosroes was thrown down by an earthquake, the sacred fire of the Magi was extinguished, the lake of Sawa was dried up, the Tigris overflowed, and all the idols of the world fell with their faces to the ground. These traditions, nevertheless, have never been raised to the height of a consecrated legend; and, in short, the narrative of the infancy of Mahomet, in spite of some blemishes, remains a charming page, both graceful and natural.<sup>1</sup> In order the better to appreciate this sobriety, I will here give a sample of the manner in which India knows how to herald the birth of her heroes.

When the creatures understood that Buddha was about to be born, all the birds of the Himalaya flew to the palace of Kapila, and placed themselves, singing and beating their wings, upon the terraces, the balustrades, the arches, the galleries, and the roofs of the palace; the ponds were

<sup>1</sup> See M. Caussin, vol. i. p. 286 *et seq.*

covered with lotus; in the houses, butter, oil, honey, and sugar, although they used them in abundance, appeared again as entire as before; the drums, harps, theorbos, and cymbals gave forth melodious sounds without being touched. Gods and hermits came together from each of the ten horizons in order to accompany Buddha. Buddha descended accompanied by hundreds of millions of divinities. At the moment he descended, the three thousand grand *milliers* of regions of the world were illuminated with an immense splendour, effacing that of the gods. Not a being underwent fright or suffering. Every one felt infinite comfort, and had only affectionate and tender thoughts. Hundreds of millions of gods sustained and carried the chair of Buddha with their shoulders, their hands, and their heads. A hundred thousand *Apsaras* conducted the choir of music before, behind, to the right, and to the left, singing the praises of Buddha. At the moment he left the bosom of his mother, all the flowers opened their cups; the young trees rose towards the sun and opened their buds; perfumed water collected from all parts; from the sides of the Himalaya the young lions ran joyously to the city of Kapila, and stayed at the gates without hurting any one. Five hundred young white elephants came and touched with their trunks the feet of the king, the father of Buddha; the children of the gods adorned with sashes appeared in the apartments of the women, going and coming from one side to the other; the women of the *Nagas* allowed half their bodies to be seen, appeared shaking themselves in the air; ten thousand daughters of the gods, holding in their hands fans of peacock tails, appeared in the blue heavens; ten thousand filled vases appeared making the tour of the great city of Kapila; a hundred thousand daughters of the gods, bearing sea-shells, drums, and tambourines suspended to their necks, appeared immovable; all the winds stayed



blowing, all the rivers and all the brooks stood still; the sun, and the moon, and the stars ceased to move. A light of a hundred thousand colours, producing a feeling of comfort in the body and soul, spread itself everywhere. The fire did not burn any more. In the galleries, in the palace, on the terraces, and on the arches of the gates, pearls and precious stones appeared suspended. The crows, the vultures, the wolves, and the jackals ceased their cries, and only made sweet and agreeable sounds. All the gods of the woods of Salas, half coming out of their leafy bodies, appeared motionless and bent. Great and small umbrellas were unfurled on all sides. The queen then walks in the garden of Loubini; a tree bent towards her and saluted her. The queen took hold of a branch of it, and looking up to heaven with favour, yawned and remained motionless. Buddha sprung from her right side without wounding it; a white lotus pierced the earth and opened to receive him. A parasol descends from heaven to cover him; a river of cold water and a river of hot water join together to bathe him, &c.<sup>1</sup>

This is what you may call starting boldly with the legend and not chaffering with a miracle. Arabia had arrived at an intellectual refinement too great for any one to put forward a supernatural legend in this style. The only time that Mahomet was willing to permit an imitation of the transcendent fancies of other religions was in his nocturnal journey to Jerusalem upon a fantastic animal. The thing turned out badly. This narrative was overwhelmed with a tempest of witticisms; many of his disciples abjured, and the Prophet hastened to withdraw his grievous idea by declaring that this marvellous journey, given out at first as real, was only a dream. Every Arab

<sup>1</sup> We take these traits among thousands in the *Lalita Vistara*, or *Legend of Buddha*, trans. by M. Edouard Foucaux. Paris, 1848.

legend of Mahomet, such as we read in Abulfeda,<sup>1</sup> for example, is limited to some narratives very soberly invented. They seek to place him in communication with the illustrious men of his time and of the preceding generation; they make his mission to prophesy among venerable personages. When he was wandering in the solitudes adjacent to Mecca, full of his thoughts, he heard a voice which said to him, "Hail! apostle of God." He turned round and only saw trees and rocks. On his flight from Mecca he took refuge in a cavern; his enemies wished to go in, when they noticed a nest in which a dove had laid its eggs, and a net of spider's web which closed the entrance. His camel was inspired, and when the chiefs of the tribes came to take off the harness in order to offer him hospitality, he said, "Let him go; it is the hand of God that guides him." His sword also performed some miracles. At the close of a battle he was seated at the foot of a tree, having this weapon on his knees; the handle was of silver. A hostile Bedouin saw him; he came near him, and pretending to be attracted by mere curiosity, said to him, "Allow me to examine thy sword." Mahomet handed it to him without hesitation. The Arab took it, drew it from the scabbard, and made a blow at him, but the sword refused to obey.

All the prodigies of his life are as transparent; he did not know how to invent anything very new of this kind. The Angel Gabriel bore all the charges of his miracles: it seems that he did not know of any other medium. The battle of Bedr alone, furnishes some examples of great marvellous creation improvised on the spot. An Arab who had placed himself on one of the surrounding mountains saw a cloud approach him, and out of the midst of the cloud he heard the neighing of horses, and a voice

<sup>1</sup> See the translation which has been given by M. Noel Desvergers, Paris, 1837.



which said, "Forward, Hayzoum!" (this is the name of the Angel Gabriel's horse). A Mussulman related that whilst pursuing a Meccan, sword in hand, he had seen the head of the fugitive fall to the ground before his sword touched him; from that he concluded that the hand of a celestial messenger had forestalled his own. Others affirmed that they had clearly distinguished angels with white turbans, with one end flowing over their shoulder, whilst Gabriel, their chief, had his head bound with a yellow turban. When we know the state of excitement in which these Arabs are before and during a battle, and when we consider that this day was the first outburst of Mussulman enthusiasm, so far from being astonished that such like stories should have found credence, we are surprised that the brain of the combatants of Bedr only produced such sober marvels.

At a much more modern epoch, and under the influence of races foreign to Arabia, the legend of Mahomet becomes complicated, as I know, with marvellous circumstances, which savour much of the grand mythological legends of the high East. The Persian, although subdued by Islamism, never yielded to the Semitic mind. In spite of the language and the religion which were imposed upon them, they survived to claim their rights as an Indo-European nation, and to create in the bosom of Islamism a philosophy, an epic, and a mythology. Open the *Ilyat-ul-Koloub*, a collection of Shiah traditions. You will see there that the night Mahomet came into the world seventy thousand palaces of ruby and seventy thousand palaces of pearl were built in Paradise, and were called the palaces of the birth. The Prophet was born circumcised; midwives of extraordinary beauty were present without having been warned. A light, of which the brightness shone through all Arabia, went with him from the womb of his mother. Immediately he was born, he threw himself on

his knees, raised his eyes to heaven, and said, "God alone is God, and I am his prophet!" God clothed his apostle with the skirt of divine contentment and with the robe of holiness, girt with the girdle of the love of God. He was shod with the sandals of respectful fear; he put on the crown of precedence, and took in hand the ring of religious authority. At three years old two angels opened his side and took out his heart, squeezed out the black drops of sin, and put there a prophetic light. Mahomet saw behind as well as before; his saliva made the sea-water sweet; his drops of sweat were like pearls; his body cast no shadow, either in the sun or by the light of the moon; no insect ever approached his person. There is nothing of the Arab in these exaggerations—they are all stamped with Persian taste. It is to misunderstand completely the character of the legend of Mahomet, to seek it in such grotesque narratives, which do not detract from the purity of the primitive Arab traditions any more than the silly amplifications of the Apocryphal Gospels affect the incomparable beauty of the Canonical Gospels.

The legendary elements of nascent Islamism have thus always remained in the state of sporadic tradition and without authority. Instead of a mysterious being, suspended between heaven and earth, without father or brother here below, we have only an Arab tainted with all the defects of his national character. Instead of this lofty and inaccessible sternness of supernaturalism which makes the Man-God say, "My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and practise it," we have here all the amiable weaknesses of the human heart. At the battle of Autas, a prisoner whom the Mussulmans were dragging roughly away cried out, "Respect me; I am related to your chief." They brought her to Mahomet. "Prophet of God," said she to him, "I am thy foster-sister. I am Schazmâ, daughter of Halimar, thy nurse, of



the tribe of Beni Sad." "What proof can you give me of that?" asked Mahomet. "A bite which you gave me on the shoulder one day when I carried you on my back," and she showed him the scar. The sight of it recalled to Mahomet the recollection of his early infancy and the care he had received in a poor family of Bedouins. It moved him tenderly. Tears filled his eyes. "Yes, thou art my sister," said he to Schazma; and taking off his cloak, he made her sit upon it. Then he continued, "If thou desirest to remain with me, thou shalt live quietly and be honoured among mine; if thou wilt rather return to thy tribe, I will place thee in a condition to pass thy days in ease." Schazma told him that she preferred the desert life, and thereupon Mahomet sent her there loaded with gifts.

Nothing is concealed as to his weaknesses and his humble belongings. He begins life as a commercial traveller in Syria, where he does a fair business; he has his surname just as any one else; they call him El Amin—the safe man. In his early youth he fights with the Koreishites against the Hawazim, and the Koreishites are not the less cut to pieces. In a race, his camel is beaten by one belonging to a Bedouin, at which he evinces much vexation. Arabia did not think she was obliged, in order to exalt her Prophet, to raise him above humanity, or to withdraw him from the affection of his tribe, his family, and others more humble still. Mussulman historians tell us that he loved his horse and his camel, that he wiped off their sweat with his handkerchief; when his cat was hungry or thirsty, he got up to open the door for it, and he took an attentive care of an old cock which he kept with him to preserve him from the evil-eye. In his home, he appears to us like a thoroughly honest father of a family. Oftentimes taking the hands of Hassan and Hussein, born of the marriage of Ali and his daughter Fatima, he made them skip and

dance, repeating to them infantile words which have been preserved.<sup>1</sup> When he saw them whilst in the midst of his preaching, he would go and embrace them and place them near him in the pulpit, and after some words of excuse on their innocence, he would resume his discourse. After the conversion of the Beni Temin to Islamism, one of their principal chiefs, Cays the son of Achim, being in Medina, went one day to Mahomet's house, and found him holding in his lap a little girl whom he covered with kisses. "What is that sheep you are smelling?" said he. "It is my child," answered Mahomet. "By God," replied Cays, "I have had plenty of little girls like that; I have buried them all alive without smelling any one of them." "Unhappy man!" cried Mahomet, "it must be that God has deprived thine heart of all feelings of humanity. Thou knowest not the sweetest joy which has been given man to experience." His biographers do not take more care than he himself took to hide his dominant passion. "Two things of the world," said he, "have an attraction for me, women and perfumes, but I only find pure happiness in prayer." This point was the only one upon which he departed from the laws of propriety and claimed his privilege of prophet. Contrary to all his rules, he had fifteen women—some say twenty-five. The most delicate episodes could not fail of happening in such an establishment. Added to that, a most subtle jealousy appears to have been one of the features of his character. A verse of the Koran expressly forbids his wives from marrying again after his death. In his last illness he said to Ayesha, "Wouldst thou not be satisfied to die before me, and to know that it would be myself who would wrap thee in the winding-sheet, who would pray for

<sup>1</sup> I have no need to warn that I am far from attaching any historic value to these narratives; I insist solely upon the character which the Arabs have attributed to their Prophet, and upon the general aspect of the legend.



thee, and who would place thee in the tomb?" "I should like that well enough," answered Ayesha, "if I had not the notion that on thy return from my burial thou wouldst come here and console thyself for my loss with some others of thy wives." This sally made the Prophet smile.

The episode of his marriage with Mary the Copt is one of the most singular. He seems to have preferred for several nights a Copt, a slave, a Christian, to the noble daughters of Abu Bekr and of Omar, of the purest blood of the Koreishites. This selection created a regular sedition amongst the harem, in consequence of which God revealed to him as follows:—"O Apostle of God! why in the face of complaints from thy wives wilt thou abstain from that which God allows thee! The Lord is good and merciful; he makes void inconsiderate oaths. He is your master; he hath knowledge and wisdom." Thus authorised to punish the rebels, the Prophet repudiated them for a month, and gave himself entirely to Mary. It was only upon the strong remonstrances of Abu Bekr and of Omar that he consented to take their daughters back, after having admonished them in another verse: "If you oppose the Prophet, know that God has declared in his favour; he will hold only to him, and repudiate all of you, and the Lord will give him better wives than you, good Mussulmanis, pious, submissive, and devout."

The scandal was even more grave still on the marriage of Mahomet with Zeynab. She was already married to Zeyd, the adopted son of the Prophet. One day when he went to visit Zeyd, he found Zeynab alone, and clothed in a thin garment which scarcely concealed the beauty of her shape. His emotion betrayed itself in a few words: "Praise to God, who disposes of hearts." Then he went away; but the sense of this exclamation did not escape Zeynab, who told Zeyd. He went immediately to Mahomet, and announced that he was ready to repudiate his

wife. The Prophet at first objected, but Zeyd insisted. "Zeynab," said he, "proud of her noble blood, has adopted towards me a haughty tone, which has destroyed the happiness of our union." In spite of the custom which forbade the Arabs from marrying the wives of their adopted sons, Zeynab a few months afterwards took rank among the wives of the Prophet. Some verses of the Koran made the murmurs of the austere Mussulmans cease, and the complaisant Zeyd saw his name inscribed in the holy book.

In short, Mahomet appears to us a man amiable, sensible, faithful, and free from hatred. His affections were sincere; his character in general inclined to benevolence. When they took his hand in greeting, he responded cordially, and was never the first to let go. He saluted little children, and showed great tenderness of heart for women and the weak. "Paradise," said he, "is at the feet of mothers." Neither ambitious thoughts nor religious exaltation had dried up in him the germ of individual sentiment. There was nothing resembling that ambitious and heartless Machiavellian who explains his projects to Zopyrus in inflexible alexandrines—

"Je dois regir en Dieu l'univers prevenu ;  
Mon empire est detruit si l'homme est reconnu."

Man, on the contrary, is with him always unmasked. He preserved the sobriety of the Arab manners without any idea of majesty. His bed was a simple cloak, and his pillow a skin filled with the leaves of the date tree. We see him milk his goats himself, and he sits on the ground to mend his clothes and his shoes. All his conduct belies the character which it is usual to attribute to him, that he was enterprising and bold. It shows him to be habitually weak, irresolute, hardly sure of himself. M. Weil goes so far as almost to look upon him as a coward. It is certain that in general he advanced timidly, and almost always



resisted the enthusiasm of those who accompanied him. His precautions in battle were hardly worthy of a prophet. He covered himself with two coats of mail, and carried on his head a helmet with a visor which concealed his countenance. At the defeat of Ohod his behaviour was most unbecoming in a messenger of God: overturned in a ditch, he owed his life to the devotion of the Ansari, who covered him with their bodies and rescued him covered with blood and mud. His extreme circumspection is displayed at every step. He listened willingly to advice, and showed much deference to it. We often see him give in to the pressure of public opinion and allow himself to be carried away beyond the dictates of prudence. His disciples, having a higher idea of his prophetic gifts than himself, and believing in him more than he believed in himself, did not understand his hesitation and caution.

All the energy which was displayed in the foundation of the new religion belongs to Omar. Omar is truly the St. Paul of Islamism, the sword which cuts and decides. We cannot doubt but that the reserved character of Mahomet would have compromised the success of his work, if he had not met with this impetuous disciple, always ready to draw the sword against those who would not, without examination, admit the religion of which he had been the most ardent persecutor. The conversion of Omar was the decisive moment in the progress of Islamism. Until then the Mussulmans practised their religion in secret, and did not dare to confess their faith in public. The boldness of Omar, his ostentation in avowing himself a Mussulman, and the terror he inspired, gave them confidence to appear in full daylight. It does not seem that Mahomet had looked beyond the horizon of Arabia, or had thought that his religion could suit any others than the Arabs. The conquering principle of Islamism, the idea that the world ought to become Mussulman, was an idea of Omar. It was he who, after

the death of Mahomet, governing in reality in the name of the feeble Abu Bekr, at the moment when the work of the Prophet was about to dissolve, stayed the defection of the Arab tribes, and gave to the new religion its final characteristic of fixity. If the heat of an impetuous temperament attaching itself with frenzy to a dogma ought to be called faith, Omar was in reality the most energetic of the faithful. Never has any one believed with so much rage; never has any one ever expended so much anger in the name of the undoubted. We often see the need of hatred to give religion a character of entirety and being without shades, for it is under the cloak of hatred that religion abandons itself with the most complete sense of security.

The rôle of prophet has always its troubles, and before compatriots well disposed to find fault, Mahomet could hardly fail in having to pass some moments of difficulty. In general, he managed with considerable skill to avoid exaggerating his part, and taking care to avoid going too far. It would appear surprising that an envoy of God should suffer defeats, should see his prophecies baffled, should gain half victories. In the great supernatural legends these things are brought about differently; everything is there determined and absolute, as becomes the God concerned in them. It was too late to take such a lofty tone in these matters; see why—everything in the life of this last of the prophets passes in a half-and-half way, in a manner thoroughly human and thoroughly historic. He is beaten, he deceives himself, he goes back, he corrects himself, he contradicts himself. The Mussulmans admit about 225 contradictions in the Koran, that is to say, 225 passages have been abrogated later on by reason of another policy.

Whatever unpardonable stains there may be on the morality of Mahomet as features in his life, we ought to guard ourselves against applying too rigorous a criticism.



It is evident that the greater part of his acts did not produce upon his contemporaries, nor did they produce upon the Oriental historians, the same impression they produce upon us. We cannot deny, however, that, by the acknowledgment of Mussulmans, Mahomet did evil in several cases with full knowledge, knowing very well that in what he did, he was obeying his own will and not the inspiration of God. He allowed robbery; he ordered assassinations; he lied, and he permitted lying in war, as a stratagem. We could cite a crowd of instances where he paltered with morality for a political motive. One of the most singular assuredly, is where he promised Othman beforehand a pardon for all the sins he should commit up to the time of his death, in compensation for a great pecuniary sacrifice. He was, above all, pitiless to wits. The only woman to whom he showed severity at the taking of Mecca, was the musician Fertena, who used to sing the satirical verses which they composed against him. His conduct towards one of his secretaries, was also very characteristic. This man, who wrote the Koran at the dictation of the Prophet, assisted too much by his own inspiration for their mutual confidence, was very lively. Mahomet did not like him; he accused him of changing words and distorting his ideas, so much so, that the secretary, having a presentiment of danger, fled and abjured Islamism. After the taking of Mecca he fell into the hands of the Mussulmans. Mahomet with much trouble was prevailed upon to pardon him, and when the apostate had gone, he humorously expressed his dissatisfaction with the Mussulmans that they had not delivered him from that man. There is also some injustice in judging severely, and with our moral notions, those acts of Mahomet which, now-a-days, we term fraud. We should picture to ourselves at what point among the Mussulmans, profound conviction, and even nobility of character, could be allied with a certain degree of imposture.

The chief of the sect of the Wahabis, Abd-el-Wahab, a true deist, the Socinianism of Islamism, did he not inspire his soldiers with the most blind confidence in giving them before the battle a safe-conduct, signed with his own hand and addressed to the treasurer of Paradise, to admit them there at once and without any previous questioning? All the founders of the *Khouan*, or religious orders of Algeria,<sup>1</sup> unite the characters of ascetics and audacious charlatans. Sidi Aissa, the most extraordinary of these modern prophets—Sidi Aissa, whose legend has almost attained the proportions of that of Mahomet, was only a juggler and showman of beasts, who skilfully made the most of his trade; and any persons who have travelled in Algeria will believe that the *Aïssaoua* are dupes of their own illusion. Certainly it would be bad taste to compare Mahomet with impostors so low. We must, however, admit that if the first condition of a prophet is to delude himself, Mahomet does not merit that title. All his life reveals a reflection, a combination, a policy which scarcely enters into the character of an enthusiast beset with divine visions. Never was a head more clear than his; never was there a man more master of his thoughts. It would be, to put the question in a narrow and superficial manner, to ask *if Mahomet believed in his own mission*; for faith alone is capable of sustaining the innovator in the fight he has to maintain for the idea of his choice. On the other hand, it is absolutely impossible to admit that a man with a conscience as clear would have believed he had the seal of prophecy between his two shoulders, and received inspiration from the Angel Gabriel for his passions and his premeditated designs. M. Weil and Washington Irving suppose, not without reason, that in the first phase of his life as prophet a truly holy enthusiasm pervaded his mind,

<sup>1</sup> See the curious work of Captain De Neveu upon this subject. Paris 1846.



and that the political period which came to him later on brought with it the contest and feeling of difficulty which tarnished the original delicacy of his inspiration. The last *surates* of the Koran, so resplendent with poetry, were the expression of his artless conviction, whilst the first *surates*, filled with disputes, contradictions, and wrongs, were the work of his practical and reflective age. We can hardly deny that the first appearances of his prophetic genius were impressed with a grand character of sanctity. We see him in solitary prayer in the desert valleys in the neighbourhood of Mecca. Ali, the son of Abu Talib, unknown to his father and uncles, accompanied him sometimes, and prayed with him, imitating his movements and his attitudes. One day Abu Talib surprised them at this occupation. "What are you doing," said he to them, "and what religion are you following?" "The religion of God, his angels, his prophets," answered Mahomet, "the religion of Abraham." How grand he is also in the first proofs of his apostolate! One evening, after having passed the day in preaching, he went into his house without having met a single individual, man or woman, free or slave, who had not loaded him with insults and rejected his exhortations with contempt. Beaten, discouraged, he wrapped himself in his cloak and threw himself down on a mat. It was then that Gabriel revealed to him the beautiful *surate*, "*Oh, thou who art enveloped in a cloak, raise thyself and preach.*" However, this perfume of sanctity only appears at rare intervals during his period of activity. Perhaps he recognised that moral sentiment and purity of soul were not sufficient for the contest against passion and interest, and that religious thought, from the moment it aspires to proselytism, is obliged to adopt the devices of its adversaries, often hardly delicate. At least it seems as if, after having believed in his prophetic mission without any mental reservation, he afterwards lost

spontaneous faith, and continued notwithstanding to go on, guided by reflection and will less great than before; somewhat like Joan of Arc returned to womanhood when she had lost her primitive simplicity. Man is too weak to bear for long a divine mission, and those only are immaculate whom God soon relieves from the burthen of the apostolate.

It is a very strange question, perhaps, but the critic is bound to put it: Up to what point did the disciples of Mahomet believe in the prophetic mission of their master? It would seem strange to call in question the absolute conviction of men whose enthusiasm for their faith hurried them from the first bound to the extremities of the earth. Important distinctions, however, are here necessary. In the circle of the first faithful, among the Mohadjir and Ansari,<sup>1</sup> the faith, it must be admitted, was very nearly absolute; but if we leave this little group, which did not exceed some thousands of men, we find around Mahomet, in all the rest of Arabia, incredulity very little disguised. The antipathy of the people of Mecca towards their compatriot was never entirely overcome. The epicurism which prevailed among the rich Koreishites, the frivolous and libertine spirit of the poets then in vogue, left no room for any profound conviction. As for the other tribes, it is certain that they only embraced Islamism formally, without inquiring into the dogma they were called on to believe, and without attaching any importance to it. They did not see any great inconvenience in pronouncing the formula of Islam except to forget it when the Prophet should be no more. When Khalid appeared among the Djaluma and summoned them to adopt the faith of the Prophet, these good people knew so little about what was

<sup>1</sup> The Mohadjir were the people of Mecca who accompanied Mahomet in his flight (Hedjra); the Ansari were those of Medina who assembled and became his defenders against his own fellow-citizens.



in question that they thought he was speaking about Sabeism, and they threw their spears in the air, crying out, "We are Sabeans!" The proud Thakif conceived a singular method to save the shamè of their conversion: they consented to submit to the new law on condition that they should keep their idol Lât for three years longer. This condition having been rejected, they demanded to keep Lât for a year, during six months, during a month. Their pride would have a concession, they repeated over and over again, and at last demanded an exemption from prayer. The conversion of the Temanites is not less curious. Their envoys presented themselves proudly, and approaching the apartments of the Prophet and his wives, "Come out, Mahomet," they cried out to him; "we come to propound to thee a contest of glory.<sup>1</sup> We have brought our poet and our orator." Mahomet went out and took a place surrounded by the disputants. The orator Otarid and the poet Zibrican began to praise, the one in jingling prose and the other in verse, the advantages of their tribe. Cays and Hassan son of Thabet, answering in improvised pieces in the same metre and the same rhyme, asserted with so much energy the superiority of the Mussulmans, that the Temanites acknowledged themselves vanquished. "Mahomet is truly a man favoured by Heaven," said they among themselves; "his orator and his poet have beaten ours," and they were thereupon made Mussulmans. All the conversions were of this kind. They made their conditions; they took them and they left them. The old Amir, son of Tofayl, came to find Mahomet. "If I embrace Islamism," said he to him, "what will my rank be?" "That of other Mussulmans," said

<sup>1</sup> They call the contest of glory, or *Moufakhara*, those poetic tournaments where each tribe represents by a poet their title to pre-eminence. The victory remained with the tribe whose poet found the strongest and happiest expressions.

Mahomet; "thou shalt have the same rights and the same duties as every one else." "This equality is not enough for me. Declare me thy successor in the command of the nation and I will join thy faith." "It does not belong to me to dispose of the command after me; God will give it to whomsoever he shall please to choose." "Well, let us divide the power now: do thou govern the cities and the Arabs with fixed dwellings, and I will rule over the Bedouins." Mahomet not being willing to agree to these conditions, Amir declined to become a Mussulman.

It is after the death of Mahomet that we can above all see how weak was the conviction which had united the different Arab tribes around him: an apostasy of the whole nearly happened. Some said that if Mahomet had really been sent by God, he would not have died; others asserted that his religion ought only to last during his life. Scarcely was the news of his end spread abroad than a cloud of prophets appeared all over Arabia; each tribe wished to have its own, like the Koreishites; the example had been contagious. Almost all the prophets were but inferior intriguers, entirely devoid of the religious initiative. Addressing themselves to the simple tribes, who were much less refined than the people of Mecca, they made use of conjuring tricks, which they gave as proofs of their divine mission. One of them, Moseilama, went through the country showing a phial with a narrow neck, in which he had inserted an egg by means of a process which he had learned from a Persian juggler. He also recited some jingling phrases which he gave as verses of a second Koran. Who will believe it? This vile impostor for several years held in check all the Mussulman forces arrayed round Abu Bekr, and balanced the destiny of Mahomet. He found a formidable rival in the prophetess Sedjah, who had succeeded in grouping behind her a powerful army of Temanites. Moseilama being pressed in Hadjr, saw no other means of disarming



his beautiful rival than by proposing an interview, which was accepted with eagerness. The prophet and prophetess came out of it, married. After three days devoted to Hymen, Sedjah returned to her camp, where the soldiers were eager to question her as to the results of her interview with Moseilama. "I have recognised in him," said she, "a true prophet, and I have married him." "Will Moseilama give us a wedding present?" asked the Temanites. "He has not spoken about that," replied Sedjah. "It will be a shame for thee and for us," they responded, "if he marries our prophetess and gives us nothing. Return to him and get us our present." Sedjah went to the gate of Hadjr, and finding it closed, called to her husband, who appeared upon the wall. A herald announced the demand of the Temanites. "Very well," said Moseilama, "you shall be satisfied. I charge you to publish the following proclamation: Moseilama the prophet of God grants exemption to the Beni Temim from the first and from the last of the five prayers which his brother Mahomet has imposed on them." The Temanites took this dispensation quite seriously, and they pretend that since then they have not made the dawn prayer or that of the night.

We can judge from these narratives how shallow was the religious movement among the Arabs.<sup>1</sup> This movement had absolutely nothing dogmatic outside the little group, very few in numbers. They say that after a victory Omar ordered that each soldier should have his share of booty in proportion to the extent in which he knew the Koran by heart; but when they came to the proof, they found that the

<sup>1</sup> The irreligious character of the Arab nomad has struck every traveller. See in particular M. D'Escayrac de Lature, *Le Désert et le Soudan*, p. 340 *et seq.* Some parts of Arabia have only become completely Mussulman since the commencement of the present century, in consequence of the Wahabi movement. In general, religions conquer more easily at a distance than in the countries whence they take their rise.

bravest among the Bedouins could not recite correctly the first formula—"In the name of God, gracious and merciful"—which made the assistants laugh. These strong and simple natures did not understand anything of mysticism. On the other hand, the Mussulman faith had found in the rich and proud families of Mecca a centre of resistance over which it could not entirely triumph. Abu Sofian, the chief of this opposition, never took frankly to the ways of a true believer. At his first interview with Mahomet after the taking of Mecca, "Ah! well, Abu Sofian," said Mahomet to him, "dost thou confess now that there is no other God than Allah?" "Yes," said Abu Sofian. "Wilt thou not also confess that I am the Prophet of Allah?" "Pardon my sincerity," replied Abu Sofian, "but upon that point I still have my doubts." A great number of pointed anecdotes bear witness to the lightly sceptical and bantering tone which this same person always preserved with regard to the new faith. But a crowd of the people of Mecca shared these sentiments. There was in Mecca quite a party of men of wit, rich, brought up on ancient Arab poetry, who were radical unbelievers. These men had too much good taste and tact to make a very lively opposition to the nascent sect; they embraced Islamism, but they kept their profane habits. This is the party of the *Mounafikoun*, or pretended Mussulmans, who play such a great part in the Koran. At the battle of Ilonayu, where the Mussulmans were defeated, these false brethren did not conceal their malignant joy. "By my faith," said Kalada, "I believe that this time Mahomet is at the end of his magic." "See them, then," said Abu Sofian; "they will run until the sea stops them." Mahomet knew very well that they held these sentiments, but, as a skilful politician, he was content with outward submission; and even in sharing the plunder, they were more favoured than the faithful, of whom he was assured.



The whole of the first age of Islamism was only a contest between the two parties that created the preaching of Mahomet. On the one side, the faithful group of Mohadjir and Ansari; on the other, the opposing party, represented by the family of the Omeiades or of Abu Sofian. The party of the sincere Mussulmans had their strength in Omar, but after the assassination of the latter, that is to say, about twelve years after the death of the Prophet, the opposition party triumphed by the election of Othman, the nephew of Abu Sofian, that is to say, the most dangerous enemy of Mahomet. All the Khalifat of Othman was a reaction against the friends of the Prophet, who found themselves expelled from the government and violently persecuted. From that time they never recovered the upper hand. The provinces could only suffer from the little aristocracy of Mohadjir and Ansari grouped at Mecca and Medina; who arrogated to themselves the right to elect the Khalif. Ali, the true representative of the primitive tradition of Islamism, was during his whole life an impossible man, and his election was never taken seriously in the provinces. On all sides they stretched out their hands to the Omeiade family, who had become Syrian in habit and interest, but the orthodoxy of the Omeiades was greatly suspected. They drank wine, practised Pagan rites, did not regard tradition, or Mussulman manners, or the sacred character of the friends of Mahomet. Thus the astonishing spectacle which the first age of the Hegira presents to us is explained; it was wholly occupied in exterminating the primitive Mussulmans, the true fathers of Islamism. Ali, the most holy of men, the adopted son of the Prophet—Ali, whom Mahomet had proclaimed his vicar, was pitilessly slain; Husein and Hassan, his sons, whom Mahomet had taken in his lap and covered with his kisses, were slaughtered. Ibn Zobeir, the first-born of the Mohadjir, who received for his first food the saliva of the

Apostle of God, was killed. The primitive faithful arrayed round the Caaba continued there the Arab life, passing the day in talking in the open space and walking in procession round the black stone; but they had become completely powerless, and the Omeyades only respected them until they thought themselves capable of storming them in their sanctuary. There was a strange scandal during this last siege of Mecca, when they saw the Mussulmans of Syria setting fire to the veil of the Caaba, and making it crumble under the blows of their balista. They say that on the first stone being thrown against the holy house thunder was heard; the Syrian soldiers trembled. "Go on," cried their chief; "I know the climate of this country; storms are frequent at this season." At the same time he took hold of the ropes of the balista and put the machine in motion.<sup>1</sup>

We arrive, then, from all parts at this singular result: that the Mussulman movement was produced almost without religious faith; that, putting aside a small number of faithful disciples, Mahomet really worked with but little conviction in Arabia, and never succeeded in overcoming the opposition represented by the Omeyade party. This is the party, kept under at first by the energy of Omar, which prevailed definitively after the death of that formidable believer, and procured the election of Othman; this is the party which opposed Ali with an invincible resistance, and finished by sacrificing him to their hatred; this is the party which triumphed at last by the coming of the Omeyades, and went even to the Caaba to slay all those who remained pure of the first generation. Hence comes the indecision which fluctuates until the twelfth century through all the dogmas of the Mussulman faith; hence that bold philosophy, proclaiming frankly the sovereign rights of reason; hence those numerous sects, professing

<sup>1</sup> For the picture of this curious epoch we can consult the memoir of M. Quatremere upon the life of Ibn Zobeir, *Journal Asiatique*, 1832.



sometimes the most avowed infidelity: Karmathes, Ismailians, Fatimites, Druses, Haschischins, Zendiks, secret sects with double meaning, joining fanaticism to incredulity, license to religious enthusiasm, the boldness of the free-thinker to the superstition of the initiated. It was not until the twelfth century that Islamism really triumphed over the undisciplined elements which agitated her bosom, and that by the coming of the Ascharite theology, more severe in its ways, and by the violent extermination of philosophy. Since that epoch, not a doubt has been produced, not a protest raised in the Mussulman world. The difficulty of religious creations rests entirely with the first generation of the faithful, who furnish the ground necessary for the belief of the future. Faith is the work of time, and the cement of religious edifices hardens as it becomes old.

## II.

Human nature, as a whole, not being entirely good or entirely bad, nor completely holy nor completely profane, we sin equally against the critic when we pretend to trace back the religious movements of humanity either to the play of passions and individual interests or to the exclusive action of superior movers. A revolution so profound as Islamism could not have been the fruit of any adroit combination, and Mahomet is not more explainable by imposture and craft than by illuminism and enthusiasm. To the eyes of the logician who places himself at the point of view of abstractions, and opposes the truth and the lie one to the other, as of absolute categories, there is no middle term between impostor and prophet. But to the eyes of the critic, who places himself in the fleeting and imperceptible middle of the reality, nothing is pure which comes out of man; everything bears, by the side of the seal

of beauty, its original stain. Who can say what line separates, in his own moral sensations, the lovely from the hateful, the ugly from the beautiful, the angelic from the satanic vision, and even in a certain degree, joy from grief? Religion being the most complete work of human nature, those who express it with the most unity participate in the contradictions of that nature, and leave out simple and absolute judgments. To wish to apply firmly to these capricious phenomena the categories of the scholastic, to judge them with the steadiness of the casuist, tracing a deep line between wisdom and folly, is to misunderstand Nature. They all succeed one another, like the mirage on Walpurgis night, in the great sabbath of all the passions and all the instincts. The saint and the scoundrel, the charming and the horrible, the apostle and the juggler, heaven and earth, take hands, like the visions of a disturbed sleep, where all the images hidden in the recesses of the fancy appear in turn.

I have for a long time insisted on the innate infirmity of Islamism; it would be unjust not to add that no religion or other institution could resist the proofs to which we could have made it submit. What prophet could hold his own against the critic if the critic pursued him, as we have ours, into his inner chamber? Happy are those whom mystery covers, and who fight entrenched behind a cloud! Perhaps, however, our age has abused the word of spontaneity in the explanation of phenomena which neither our experience of the present nor the evidence of history could make us understand. The reaction against the school which had exaggerated the creative powers of the reflective faculties, which wished to see in language, religious and moral beliefs, and primitive poetry, only deliberate inventions, we are too much disposed, it seems, to believe that every idea of composition ought to be excluded from primitive poems, and all idea of impos-



ture from the formation of great legends. In place of saying that language, popular religious beliefs, and poetry are made of themselves, it would be exact to say we do not see them made. The spontaneous is perhaps only the obscure; for see, the only religion of which the origins are clear and historic, and in these origins we find a great deal of reflection, deliberation, and combination. It may not please God that I should be willing, whatever it may be, to apply a touch to the majesty of the past. When criticism is applied for the first time to a fact or to a book which has retained the respect of a great number of generations, we find almost always that admiration is beside the question; we perceive a thousand artifices, a thousand retouchings or thereabouts, which destroy the grand impression of beauty or sanctity which had beguiled the non-critical ages. What a day in the fortunes of Homer was that when the ill-conditioned scholiasts of Venice came and revealed to us the touches of the pens of Zenodotus and Aristarchus, and introduced, as it were, to the committee where the poem was elaborated, until it appeared to be the most direct emanation, the most limpid spirit of personal genius! Is that to say that criticism has destroyed Homer? So you might say that the progress of philosophy and ethics has destroyed antiquity, because they have shown the nothingness of certain beauties which had been greatly approved for a long time, but of which antiquity was perfectly innocent. So you might say that exegesis has destroyed the Bible, because, instead of the nonsense of the Vulgate, it has shown a brilliant literature of original character.

Criticism displaces admiration, but it does not destroy it. Admiration is essentially a synthetical act. It is not in dissecting a beautiful body that we discover the beauty of it; it is not in examining with a hammer the events of history and the works of the human mind that we recog-

nise their high character. We can affirm that if we should see the great things of the past as near as the mean agitations of the present, all prestige would vanish, and there would remain nothing to adore. But it is not in this inferior region of the fluctuations and defects of the individual that we should search for eternal beauty. Things are only beautiful from what Humanity sees in them, from the sentiments which she attaches to them, from the symbols she draws of them. It is she who has created these absolute tones which never existed in the reality. Reality is complex, mixed with good and evil, admirable and criticisable, at the same time worthy of love and hatred. On the contrary, that which obtains the homage of humanity is simple, without stain, and altogether admirable. Criticism entirely preoccupied with the truth, secured otherwise as to the consequences, inasmuch as it knows that the result of its researches do not penetrate into the regions where illusions are necessary, has for its mission the repair of nonsense which scarcely troubles humanity. We do not exaggerate the importance of this mission. What does it matter, indeed, whether humanity commits historic errors in its admiration, whether it makes the men whom it has adopted more beautiful and more pure than they were in reality? The homage which they have addressed to the beauty which they have supposed for them, and which they have put into them, is not on that account less deserving. From the point of view of historic truth the learned alone have the right to admire, but from the moral point of view the ideal belongs to all. Sentiments have their value independent of the reality of the object which excites them, and we may doubt whether humanity ever partakes of the scruples of the learned, who would only admire on being certain.

After having done the part of terrestrial dust in the work of the founder of Islamism, I ought to show now



what part of that work was holy and legitimate, that is to say, in what it corresponds with the deepest instincts of human nature, and in particular with the needs of Arabia in the seventh century.

Islamism appears up to this point in history as an original and unprecedented effort. It was almost a compulsive formula to present Mahomet as the founder of civilisation, monotheism, and even (this grave mistake has been indefinitely repeated) of the literature of the Arabs. But we can say that, so far from commencing with Mahomet, Arab genius found in him its last expression. I do not know if there is in all the history of civilisation a picture more pleasing, more agreeable, and more animated than that of Arab life before Islamism, such as it appears to us in the *Moallakât*, and above all in the admirable type of Antar: entire liberty for the individual, complete absence of law and power, a lofty sentiment of honour, nomad and chivalric life, fancy, gaiety, archness, light and undevotional poetry, refinement of love. But this delicate flower of Arab life ended for ever on the coming of Islamism. The last poets of the great school disappeared whilst making the liveliest opposition to the nascent religion. Twenty years after Mahomet, Arabia was humiliated and surpassed by the conquered provinces. A hundred years after, Arab genius was completely effaced; Persia triumphed by the coming of the Abbassides; Arabia disappeared for ever from the scene of the world; and while her language and religion carried civilisation from Malaya to Morocco, from Timbuctoo to Samarkand, she, forgotten, driven back to her deserts, returned to the state in which she was in the days of Ishmael. Thus there is in the life of races an original and rapid lightning-flash of consciousness, a divine moment, when, prepared by a slow interior evolution, they attain the light, produce the chief work, and then efface themselves, as if the grand effort had exhausted their fecundity

Mahomet is no more the founder of monotheism than of civilisation and literature among the Arabs. This result, from numerous facts, is shown for the first time by M. Caussin de Perceval. He says that Mahomet followed the religious movement of his time, instead of leading it. Monotheism—the worship of the supreme Allah (*Allah ta'ala*)—seems to have been always at the bottom of the Arab religion. The Semitic race has never conceived the government of the universe other than as an absolute monarchy. Their theodicea has not advanced a step since the Book of Job; the grandeur and the aberrations of polytheism have always remained foreign to them. Some superstitions connected with idolatry, which varied with each tribe, had, however, altered among the Arabs the purity of the patriarchal religion, and, in face of religions more strongly organised, all the enlightened minds of Arabia aspired to a better worship. A people do not arrive at a conception of the insufficiency of their religious system except by communication with strangers, and the epochs of religious creation ordinarily follow the epochs of intermixture between races. But in the sixth century, Arabia, which up till then had remained inaccessible, opened itself on all sides. Greeks, Syrians, Persians, Abyssinians all penetrated at once. The Syrians introduced writing; the Abyssinians and the Persians governed by turns the Yemen and the Bahren. Many tribes recognised the suzerainty of the Greek emperors, and received from them a toparch or governor. The most singular episode, perhaps, in ante-Islamic history is that of the prince-poet Imroulcays, going to seek an asylum in Constantinople, having an amorous intrigue with the daughter of Justinian, chanting it in Arabic verses, and being poisoned by the orders of the Byzantine Court. The diversity of religions brought about equally in Arabia a singular movement of ideas. Whole tribes had embraced Judaism; Chris-



tianity had considerable churches in Nedjran and in the kingdoms of Hira and Ghassan. On all sides there were religious disputations. There still remains a curious monument of these controversies in the dispute of Gregentius, the Bishop of Zhefar, against the Jew Herban. A sort of vague toleration and syncretism of all the Semitic religions ended by establishing it. The ideas of an only God, of Paradise, of resurrection, of prophets, and of sacred books were insinuated little by little even among the Pagan tribes. The Caaba became the Pantheon of all the worship. When Mahomet drove the images out of the holy dwelling, among the number of the expelled gods was a Byzantine virgin, painted on a column, holding her son in her arms.

This great religious work betrayed itself to the outward world by certain significant facts which announced an approaching hatching. There were a number of people dissatisfied with the old mode of worship who went abroad in search of a better religion, trying by turns the different existing modes, and at last in despair created for themselves an individual religion in harmony with their moral needs. Every religious appearance is thus preceded by a sort of unrest and vague expectation, which manifests itself in some privileged souls by presentiments and longings. Islamism had its John the Baptist and its old man Simeon.<sup>1</sup> Some years before the preaching of Mahomet, whilst the Koreishites were celebrating the feast of one of their idols, four men, more enlightened than the rest of their nation, met outside the crowd and communicated their thoughts to each other. "Our countrymen," said they, "walk in a false path; they have departed from the religion of Abraham.

<sup>1</sup> It was the same with Buddhism. At the sight of the marvellous appearances which accompanied the birth of Buddha, a hermit of the Himalaya, possessing the five transcendant sciences, came to Kapila across the heavens, took the child in his arms, and recognised in him the thirty-four signs of the great man and the twenty-two marks of Buddha.

What is this pretended divinity to which they sacrifice victims, and round which they make solemn processions? Let us seek the truth and find it. Let us, if it must be, leave our country and go into foreign parts." The four persons who formed this plan were Waraca the son of Naufal, Othman the son of Howayrith, Obeidallah the son of Djahsch, and Zeyd the son of Amru.

Waraca had drawn from his frequent relations with the Christians and the Jews, instruction superior to that of his fellow-citizens. Adopting a belief which was very prevalent, he was persuaded that a messenger from heaven would soon appear upon earth, and that this messenger would come from the Arab nation. He had acquired a knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, and had read the sacred books. Khadija, his cousin, having related to him the first vision of her husband, he declared that Mahomet was the prophet of the Arabs, and foretold the persecutions he would have to endure. He died shortly afterwards, having only had a glimpse of the dawn of Islamism.

Othman the son of Howayrith went abroad, interrogating all those from whom he hoped to gain any light. Religious Christians inspired him with a taste for the faith of Jesus Christ. He presented himself at the court of the Emperor of Constantinople, where he received baptism. Obeidallah the son of Djahsch, after fruitless efforts to attain the faith of Abraham, remained in uncertainty and doubt until the moment when Mahomet began his preaching. At first he thought that he recognised in Islamism the true religion he sought for, but soon he renounced it to devote himself definitively to Christianity. As to Zeyd the son of Amru, he continued all his days at the Caaba and prayed to God to enlighten him. He was to be seen, with his back resting against the wall of the temple, devoting himself to pious meditations, which he afterwards delivered. "Lord, if I only knew in what manner thou



desirest to be served and worshipped, I would obey thy will ; but I am ignorant." Afterwards he prostrated himself with his face to the ground. Adopting neither the ideas of the Jews nor the Christians, Zeyd made a religion of his own, endeavouring to conform to what he believed to have been the worship followed by Abraham. He rendered homage to the unity of God, attacked publicly the false gods, and declaimed with energy against superstitious practices. Persecuted by his fellow-citizens he fled, and went to Mesopotamia and Syria, consulting everywhere men devoted to religious study, in the hope of finding the patriarchal religion. A learned Christian monk with whom he was intimate, informed him, they say, of the appearance of an Arab prophet who was preaching the religion of Abraham at Mecca. Zeyd, deeply impressed, started to go to hear the apostle, but was stopped on his way by a band of robbers, who despoiled and put him to death.

Thus from all parts a great religious revival appeared ; from all sides they said that the time of Arabia was come. Prophetism is the form which these great revolutions take among Semitic people, and prophetism is, to speak truly, but the necessary consequence of the monotheistic system. Primitive people, believing themselves to be always in immediate communication with the Divinity, and regarding great events of the physical and moral order as effects from the direct action of superior beings, have only two ways of conceiving this influence of God in the government of the universe : when the Divine power is incarnated under a human form, which is the Indian *avatar*, or when God chooses a privileged mortal as an organ, which is the *Nabi* or Semitic prophet. There is such a distance between God and man in the Semitic system, that the only communication from one to the other must be by an interpreter remaining always distinct from the being who inspires. To say that Arabia was about to enter into the

era of great things, is to say that she was about to have a prophet of her own, as the other Semitic families. Many individuals, outstripping the maturity of the times, believed, or pretended to be, the promised prophet. Mahomet grew in the midst of this movement. His journeys in Syria, his communications with the Christian monks, and perhaps the personal influence of his uncle, Waraca, so well versed in the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, had initiated him in all the religious perplexities of his age. He did not know either to read or to write, but the Biblical histories had reached him by the narratives with which he had been vividly impressed, and which had left his mind in a state of vague remembrances, giving full scope to his imagination. The reproach which has been applied to Mahomet of having altered Biblical history is entirely misplaced. Mahomet adopted the narratives as they were given to him, and the narrative part of the Koran is only the reproduction of Rabbinical traditions and Apocryphal Gospels. The Gospel of the Infancy, above all, which was early translated into Arabic, and which had been preserved in that language, had acquired an extreme importance among the Christians of the scattered regions of the East, and had almost effaced the Canonical Gospels. It is certain that the narratives of which we speak were one of Mahomet's most powerful means of action. Nadhr the son of Harith undertook sometimes to make a concordance. He had lived in Persia, and knew the legends of the ancient kings of that country. When Mahomet, collecting around him a circle of hearers, presented them with the features of the patriarchal life and of the prophets, and examples of divine vengeance which had fallen upon impious nations, Nadhr took up the word after him and said, "Listen now to things which are worth more than those which Mahomet has told you of." He then related the most astonishing facts of the heroic history of Persia, the marvellous exploits



of the heroes Rustum and Isfendiar; then he added, "The stories of Mahomet, are they better than mine? He recites ancient legends which he has gathered from the mouth of men more learned than he is, so I have myself collected in my journeys and put into writing the stories I have told you."

Long before Islamism the Arabs had adopted the traditions of the Jews and Christians to explain their own origin. We have often looked upon the legend by which the Arabs connect themselves with Ishmael as having an historic value, and furnishing strong confirmation of the Bible narrative. In the eyes of a severe critic this is inadmissible. We cannot but doubt that the Biblical reputations of Abraham, Job, David, and Solomon commenced among the Arabs during the fifth century. The Jews (People of the Book) had retained until then the archives of the Semitic race, and the Arabs willingly recognised their superiority in learning. The book of the Jews mentioned the Arabs, and attributed to them a genealogy: they could not have done otherwise than accept it with confidence; such is the effect of writing on a simple people, always eager to connect their origin with that of more civilised people. It is said that at the time when Mahomet first began to be noticeable, the people of Mecca sent a deputation to Medina to consult the Rabbins in that city upon what they thought of the new prophet. The deputation described the person of Mahomet to the doctors, and explained what he said in his discourses, and added, "You are learned men who read books; what do you think of this man?" The doctors replied, "Ask him what young men of former times were they whose adventure is a wonder? What personage was it who reached the limits of the earth from east to west? What is the soul? If he answers these three questions in such and such a way, he is truly a prophet. If he answers otherwise, he is an

impostor." Mahomet answered the first enigma by the history of the seven sleepers, which was popular throughout the East; the second by Dhoul Carnayu, a fabulous conqueror, the legendary Alexander of the pseudo-Callisthenes. As to the third, he replied—alas! perhaps all that it is permitted to answer—"The soul is a thing whereof the knowledge is reserved for God. It is not accorded to man to possess more than a very weak glimmering of knowledge."

The dogmatic part of Islamism assumes still less of creation than the legendary part. Mahomet was entirely devoid of invention in this sense. A stranger to the refinements of mysticism, he only sought to found a simple religion, limited on all sides by common sense; timid, like everything born of reflection; narrow, like everything governed by the sentiment of the real. The symbol of Islamism, at least before the relatively modern invasion of theological subtleties, scarcely surpassed the most simple data of natural religion. No transcendent pretension; none of those bold paradoxes of supernaturalism, where the fancy of gifted races employs itself with so much originality on the subject of infinity; no priests, and no mode of worship beyond prayer.

All the ceremonies of the Caaba, the processions round it, the pilgrimages, the *omra*, the sacrifices in the valley of Mina, the lewdness of Mount Arafat, were organised in all their details some time before Mahomet. Pilgrimages were, moreover, from time immemorial, an essential element of Arab life; they were what the Olympic games were for Greece—I would say, the public festivals of the nation, at once religious, commercial, and poetical. The valley of Mecca thus became the central point of Arabia; and, notwithstanding the division and rivalry of the tribes, the hegemony of the family who guarded the Caaba was implicitly recognised. It was a very serious moment,



and almost an era in the history of the Arabs, when they put a lock upon the sacred house. From thence authority was derived from the possession of the keys of the Caaba. The Koreishite Cossay, having made the Khoraite Abu Gobschan, the keeper of the keys, intoxicated, bought them from him, says the legend, for a leather bottle of wine, and thus founded the primatial authority of his tribe.

From this moment commenced the great movement of organisation among the Arab tribes. Up to that time they had only dared to set up tents in the sacred valley. Cossay grouped there the Koreishites, reconstructed the Caaba, and was the true founder of the city of Mecca. All the most important institutions date from Cossay: the *Nadwa*, or central council sitting at Mecca; the *liwa*, or flag; the *rifada*, or alms intended for pilgrims; the *sicaya*, or superintendence of the water—a capital duty in a country like the Hedjaz; the *nasaa*, or the intercalation of days in the calendar; the *hidjaba*, or the guard of the keys of the Caaba. These functions, which involved every political and religious institution of Arabia, were exclusively reserved to the Koreishites. Thus in the middle of the fifth century the germ of centralisation of Arabia was already planted, and the point from which the religious and political organisation of the country was to start was planned in advance. Cossay, in one sense, has founded more than Mahomet. He was even regarded as a sort of prophet, and his will passed for an article of religion.

Haschem, in the first half of the sixth century, completed the work of Cossay, and extended the commercial relations of his tribe in a surprising manner. He established two caravans, one in winter for Yemen, and one in summer for Syria. Abd-el-Mottalib, the son of Haschem and grandfather of Mahomet, continued the traditional work of the Koreishite oligarchy by the discovery of the well at Zem-

zem.<sup>1</sup> The well of Zemzem, independently of the tradition which attaches to it, was, in an arid valley so frequented as that of Mecca, a very important point, and assured pre-eminence to the family who had appropriated it. The tribe of Koreishites thus found themselves elevated, like that of Judah among the Hebrews, to the rank of a privileged tribe, destined to realise the unity of the nation. Mahomet, then, only put the crown on the work of his ancestors. In politics, as in religion, he invented nothing, but he has realised with energy the aspirations of his age. It remained to seek for the help which he found in the eternal instincts of human nature, and now he could give to his work the most steady foundation by resting it upon the weakness of the heart.

Independently of all dogmatic belief, there are in man, religious wants which incredulity cannot help him to supply. We are surprised sometimes that a religion can live so long after the fabric of its dogmas has been undermined by the critic; but in reality a religion is not based on, nor is it overthrown by, reasoning; the object of its existence is in the most imperious needs of our nature—the need of love, the need of suffering, and the need of belief. This is why woman is an essential element in all religious foundations. Christianity has literally been founded by woman.<sup>2</sup> Islamism, which is not exactly a holy religion, but rather a natural religion, serious and liberal—in a word, a religion of men—has nothing, I confess, to compare to the admirable types of the Magdalen or Thekla. However, this cold and reasonable religion had sufficient attraction to fascinate the devout sex. Nothing

<sup>1</sup> This is the fountain which, according to Arab legend, God made to burst forth in the desert to quench the thirst of Ishmael.

<sup>2</sup> See the ingenious sketches of M. Saint Marc-Girardin upon the part of woman in the origin of Christianity in his *Essais de Littérature et de Morale*, vol. ii.



is more incorrect than the notion generally prevalent in the West as to the condition allotted to woman by Islamism. The Arab woman in the time of Mahomet in no way resembled the stupid being who fills the harem of the Ottomans. In general, it is true, the Arabs had a bad opinion of the moral qualities of woman, because the character of woman is exactly the contrary to that which the Arabs regard as the type of the perfect man. We read in the *Kitab-el-Aghani* that a chief of the tribe of Jaschkor named Moschamradj, having in an inroad against the Temanites carried off a young girl of noble family, Cays the son of Acim, the uncle of the young girl, went to redeem her from Moschamradj, and offered him a ransom. Moschamradj gave his prisoner the option of remaining with him or returning to her family; the girl, who was enamoured of her captor, preferred him to her parents. Cays then returned so stupified and indignant at the weakness of a sex capable of such a choice, that on reaching his tribe he buried alive two daughters he had of a younger age, and swore that he would treat all the daughters which should be born to him in the same way. These simple and loyal natures could not understand the passion which raises woman above the exclusive affections of the tribe, but they regarded them as inferior beings, without individuality. There were some women who were their own mistresses, having the full enjoyment of their property, choosing their husband, and having the right to dismiss him when they thought proper. Many were distinguished for poetical talent and literary taste. Have we not seen a woman, the beautiful El-Khausâ, contend with glory against the most celebrated poets of the grand age? Others make their houses the meeting-place of literary men and wits. Mahomet, in further relieving the condition of a sex whose charms impressed him so greatly, was not repaid with ingratitude.

The sympathy of the woman contributed not a little to console him in the first days of his mission for the affronts he received: they saw that he was persecuted, and they loved him. The first age of Islamism furnishes many female characters truly remarkable. After Omar and Ali, the two principal figures of this great epoch are those of two women, Ayesha and Fatima. An aureole of sanctity shines around Khadija, and is truly a very honourable proof in favour of Mahomet that, by a single circumstance in the history of prophetism, his divine mission should have been recognised from the first by one to whom his weaknesses would be best known. When, after preaching, he was accused of imposture and made a butt for jokes, he came and confided his troubles to her, she consoled him with words of tenderness and strengthened his shaken faith. Khadija was never confounded in Mahomet's mind with the other wives who succeeded her. It is said that one of them, jealous of so much constancy, having one day asked the Prophet if Allah had not given him something to make him forget the old Khadija, "No," replied he; "when I was poor, she made me rich; when others accused me of lying, she believed in me; when I was cursed by my nation, she remained faithful to me, and the more I suffered the more she loved me." Afterwards, whenever one of his wives wished to ask a favour, she began to praise Khadija.

The touchstone of a religion, after its women, is its martyrs. Persecution is indeed the first of religious luxuries; it is so sweet to the heart of man to suffer for his faith, that this sweetness is sometimes sufficient to make him believe. The Christian conscience has marvelously understood it, in creating those admirable legends where so many of the conversions were brought about by the charm of punishment. Islamism, although it remained a stranger to this profundity of sentiment, has also reached in its story of the martyrs some fairly lofty features. The



slave Belâl would not have been out of place among the touching heroes of the Golden Legend. In the eyes of Mussulmans, the true martyrs are those who have perished whilst fighting for the true religion. Here there is a confusion of ideas to which we cannot bring ourselves. The death of a soldier and that of a martyr are connected in our minds with very different sensations, but Mussulman genius has succeeded in enveloping both deaths with high poetic feeling. It was a beautiful and grand scene, for example, the funeral of those who fell at the battle of Ohod. "Bury them without washing off the blood," cried Mahomet; "they will appear on the day of resurrection with their bleeding wounds, which exhale the odour of musk, and I will bear witness that they have perished as martyrs for the faith." The standard-bearer, Djafr, had had his two hands cut off, and fell pierced with ninety wounds, all in front. Mahomet carried the news to his widow. He took the young son of the martyr upon his knees, and caressed his head in a manner which the mother well understood. "His two hands have been cut off," said he, "but God has given him in exchange two wings of emerald, with which he is now flying, wherever he likes, among the angels of Paradise."

The conversions are in general prepared with a good deal of art. Almost all of them recall that of St. Paul. The persecutor becomes an apostle; the victim, brought down by a paroxysm of anger, receives the supreme blow which stretches him full length before the feet of triumphant grace. The legend of the conversion of Omar is, according to report, an incomparable page of religious psychology. Omar had been the most determined enemy of the Mussulmans. The terrible energy of his character had made him the terror of the still timid faithful, and compelled them to hide. One day, in a moment of exaltation, he went out with the full determination of killing

Mahomet. On the way he met Noaym, one of his parents, who, seeing him sword in hand, asked him where he was going and what he was about to do. Omar disclosed his design. "Passion carries thee away," said Noaym to him; "why dost thou not rather correct those members of thy family who have abjured at thine instance the religion of their fathers?" "And those persons of my family, who are they?" said Omar. "Thy brother-in-law, Said, and thy sister Fatima," replied Noaym. Omar ran to the house of his sister. Said and Fatima were at that moment receiving secret instructions from a disciple, who was reading to them a chapter of the Koran written on a sheet of parchment. At the noise of Omar's step the catechist hid himself in a dark recess; Fatima concealed the parchment under her clothes. "What is that I heard you singing in a bass voice?" said Omar on entering. "Nothing; thou hast deceived thyself." "You were reading something, and I am told you have joined the sect of Mahomet." In saying these words Omar caught sight of his brother-in-law. Fatima tried to cover him, and the two cried out, "Yes, we are Mussulmans. We believe in God and his Prophet. Kill us if you wish it." Omar, striking blindly, hit and grievously wounded his sister Fatima. At the sight of the blood of a woman shed by his hand, the impetuous young man relented all at once. "Show me the writing you have been reading," said he with apparent calmness. "I fear," answered Fatima, "that you will tear it up." Omar swore to return it intact. Scarcely had he read the first lines. "How beautiful that is! how sublime that is!" cried he. "Show me where the Prophet is. I go this moment to give myself to him." At that moment Mahomet was in a house situated on the hill of Safa with forty of his disciples, to whom he was explaining his doctrines. Some one knocked at the door. One of the Mussulmans looked out of the window. "It is Omar

with a sword by his side," said he with terror. Consternation was general. Mahomet ordered the door to be opened. He went towards Omar, took him by the cloak, and drew him towards the middle of the circle. "What motive brings thee, son of Khattab?" said he to him. "Wilt thou persist in thine impiety until the chastisement of Heaven falls upon thee?" "I come," answered Omar, "to declare that I believe in God and his Prophet." All the assemblage returned thanks to Heaven for this unlooked-for conversion.

On quitting, the faithful Omar went straight to the house of a certain Djemil, who passed as the greatest talker in Mecca. "Djemil," said he, "learn some news. I am a Mussulman; I have adopted the religion of Mahomet." Djemil hurried off to the open space in front of the Caaba, where the Koreishites assembled to talk together. He arrived crying aloud, "The son of Khattab is perverted." "Thou liest," said Omar, who had followed him closely. "I am not perverted; I am a Mussulman. I confess there is no other God than Allah, and that Mahomet is his prophet." These provocations ended by making the others furious, and they threw themselves upon him. Omar sustained the shock, and getting clear of his assailants, "By God," he cried, "if we were only three hundred Mussulmans, we should soon see who would be master of this temple." This is the same man who, later on, could not understand how any one could agree with infidels, and who, sword in hand, rushed out of the house where he had seen Mahomet expire, and declared that he would break the head of any one who should dare to say that the prophet could die.

At last, by his marvellous skill in Arab æsthetics, Mahomet created a mode of action all-powerful with a people infinitely sensitive to the charm of fine language. The Koran was the sign of a literary revolution as well as that of a religious revolution. It signified among the Arabs



the introduction of a style of versified prose, a poetic eloquence—a moment so important in the intellectual life of a people. At the commencement of the seventh century the great poetic generation of Arabia had gone; traces of weariness were everywhere manifest; the ideas of literary criticism appeared like a sign of evil augury for genius. Antar, that Arab nature so fresh and so unaltered, commenced his *Moallakât*, almost as though he were a poet of decadence, with these words, “What subjects have not the poets sung?” An immense surprise overtook Mahomet when he appeared in the midst of an exhausted literature with his living, earnest recitations. The first time that Otba the son of Rebia heard this energetic language, sonorous, full of rhythm though not rhymed, he returned to his family quite aghast. “What is it now?” they asked him. “My faith!” answered he, “Mahomet has used language such as I never heard. It is neither poetry nor prose, nor magic language, but it is something piercing.” Mahomet did not like the refined prosody of Arab poetry; he made false quantities when he quoted verses, and God himself charged him to excuse them in the Koran. “We have not taught versification to our Prophet.” He repeats everywhere that he is neither a poet nor a magician. The vulgar, indeed, were constantly confounding him with these two classes of men, and it is true that his rhymed and sententious style had some resemblance to that of the magicians. Certainly it is impossible for us, at the present day, to comprehend the charm which the Koran exercised on its appearance. The book seems declamatory, monotonous, and wearisome: the reading of it is almost unbearable; but we must recollect that Arabia, having no idea of the plastic art or of great beauty of composition, made perfection of form to consist exclusively in the details of style. Language is, in his eyes, something divine, the most precious gift which God has given to

the Arab race, the most certain sign of his pre-eminence ; it is the Arab language itself, with its learned grammar, its infinite riches, and its subtle delicacy.<sup>1</sup> We cannot doubt but that Mahomet owed his principal success to the originality of his language and the new turn he had given to Arab eloquence. The most important conversions—that of the poet Lebid, for example—were brought about by the effect of certain passages in the Koran ; and to those who demanded from him a sign,<sup>2</sup> Mahomet never offered any answer other than the perfect purity of the Arabic he spoke, and the fascination of the new style of which he had the secret.

Thus Islamism combines, with a unity of which we can with difficulty find another example, the moral, religious, and æsthetic ideas ; in a word, the life according to the spirit of a great family of humanity. We must not demand from it the lofty spiritualism which India and Germany only have known, nor that feeling of proportion and perfect beauty which Greece has bequeathed to the Latin races, nor that gift of strange, mysterious, and truly divine fascination which has reunited all civilised humanity without distinction of race, in the veneration of the same ideal part of Judea. It would be putting matters in disproportion if we placed æsthetical Pantheism on a footing of equality with all the productions of human nature, and placed in the same degree on the scale of beauty the pagoda and the Greek temple, because they are the outcome of a conception equally original and spontaneous. Human nature is always beautiful, it is true, but it is not always equally beautiful.

<sup>1</sup> The Arabs represent that their language alone has a grammar, and that all the other idioms are only coarse patois. Sheikh Rifaa, in his story of his travels in France, gives himself much trouble to destroy the prejudices of his fellow-countrymen on this point, and informs them that the French language also has rules, delicacy, and an academy.

<sup>2</sup> The word *aiat*, which means the verses of the Koran, would mean a sign or miracle.

There is everywhere the same motive, there are the same consonances and dissonances of terrestrial and divine instincts, but not the same plenitude nor the same sonorousness. Islamism is evidently the product of an inferior, or, we may say, mediocre combination of human elements. This is why it has only conquered in the middle state of human nature. It has not been able to raise savage races, and, on the other hand, it could not satisfy the people who had the germ of a stronger civilisation. Persia, the only Indo-European country where Islamism has attained an absolute dominion, has only adopted it by making it submit to the most profound modifications in order to make it agree with its mystical and mythological tendencies. Its extreme simplicity has everywhere been an obstacle to the truly fruitful development of science, great poetry, and delicate morality.

If it should be asked what will be the future destiny of Islamism in the face of an essentially encroaching civilisation, which seems fated to become universal as far as the infinite diversity of the human species will permit, we must confess that nothing up to this enables us to form any precise ideas upon the subject. On the one side, it is certain that if Islamism should ever, I do not say disappear, for religions do not die, but lose the high intellectual and moral direction of an important part of the universe, it will succumb not under the influence of another religion, but under the blow of modern knowledge, bearing with it the habits of rationalism and criticism. On the other hand, it should be remembered that Islamism, very different from those lofty towers which resist the storm and fall all at once, has even in its flexibility hidden powers of resistance. Christian nations, in order to carry out their religious reforms, have been compelled to violently break up their unity and to organise in open rebellion against the central authority. Islamism, which has neither pope,



nor councils, nor bishops of divine institution, nor a very determined clergy—Islamism, which has never sounded the formidable abyss of infallibility, ought to be less afraid perhaps of the waking up of rationalism. What indeed should the critic attack in it? The legend of Mahomet? This legend has scarcely more sanction than the pious beliefs which in the bosom of Catholicism we can reject without being heretical. Strauss here has evidently nothing to do. Should it be the dogma? Reduced to its essential limits, Islamism only adds to natural religion the prophetism of Mahomet and a certain conception of fatalism, which is less an article of faith than a general turn of mind susceptible of being conveniently directed. Should it be the morality? We have the choice of four sects equally orthodox amongst whom the moral sense preserves an honest part of liberty. As to the mode of worship, freed from some accessory superstitions, it can be compared as regards simplicity with that of the purest Protestant sects. Have we not seen at the commencement of this century, even in the country of Mahomet, a sectary rouse the vast political and religious movement of the Wahabis by proclaiming that true worship to render to God consists in prostrating oneself before the idea of his existence, that the invocation of an intercessor near him is an act of idolatry, and that the most meritorious work would be to raze the tomb of the Prophet and the mausoleums of the Imams?

Symptoms of a much more serious nature have revealed themselves, as I know, in Egypt and in Turkey. There contact with science and European manners has produced a freedom of thought sometimes scarcely disguised. Sincere believers, conscious of danger, do not conceal their alarm, and denounce the books of European science as containing fatal errors subversive of all religious faith. I do not the less persist in believing that if the East could

get over its apathy, and pass the limits which it has not until now gone beyond in the matter of rational speculation, Islamism would not oppose a very serious obstacle to the progress of the modern spirit. The want of theological centralisation has always left to the Mussulman nations a certain religious liberty, although Mr. Foster says the Khalifat has never resembled the Papacy. The Khalifat has never been strong enough to represent the first conquering idea of Islamism. When the temporal power had passed to the *Emir-al-omra*, and the Khalifat was only a religious power, it fell into the most deplorable abasement. The idea of a purely spiritual power is too delicate for the East; all the branches of Christianity are not themselves able to attain it; the Græco-Slav branch has never understood it; the Germanic family have shaken it off and passed beyond it; only the Latin nations have submitted to it. But experience has shown that the simple faith of a people is not sufficient to preserve a religion, if a constituted hierarchy and a spiritual chief do not carefully guard it. Was faith wanting to the Anglo-Saxon people when the will of Henry VIII. made them pass, without their perceiving it, one day to schism, and the next day to heresy? Mussulman orthodoxy, not being defended by a permanent autonomous body, which recruits itself and registers its members, is then sufficiently vulnerable. It is superfluous to add that if ever a reform movement manifests itself in Islamism, Europe ought only to participate in it by its influence in a general way. It would be bad taste to seek to regulate the faith of others. Every one, in actively pursuing the propagation of his dogma, which is civilisation, ought to leave to the people the infinitely delicate task of suiting their religious traditions to their new needs, and respect the imprescriptible right which nations as well as individuals have of presiding themselves in the most perfect freedom at the revolutions of their own conscience.

## THE LIFE OF THE SAINTS.

THE Catholic renaissance, which will mark in history the middle of the nineteenth century, will leave behind it two sorts of productions: one feeble, frivolous, and in bad taste, like everything in the nature of reaction; the other serious, and, like everything serious, useful, even when the extravagant fondness which gave them birth has passed away. Among the latter we must put in the first line the continuation of the great collection, said to be of the Bollandists, destined, according to the notion of the authors, to present in the order of the calendar the life of all the saints of the Catholic Church. We know that this great collection, of which the history would form a book of itself,<sup>1</sup> was commenced in 1643 at Antwerp by the Jesuit Bolland, interrupted in 1794 by the Revolution, was not completed, with its fifty-three volumes of folio, until the 14th October. After several renewals and different opinions, Monge in the name of the Institute, M. Guizot in the name of historic science, the statesmen of Belgium in the name of national honour, insisted on the utility of a continuation of this precious list. By a vote of the Belgian Chambers of 8th May 1837, the existence of a new Society of Bollandists, taken from the midst of the Society of Jesus, was assured; and two volumes, already published,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A lively and earnest historian, but always attractive and instructive, has been found in the learned Abbé Pitra, *Etudes sur la Collection des Actes des Saints*. Paris, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> *Acta Sanctorum Octobris*, vols. vii. and viii. Brussels, 1845-53.



forming a total of more than 2400 pages, attest the zeal with which these new workers have taken up the work of their fathers. From the vast materials bequeathed by the ancient Society, and miraculously preserved through a series of perilous adventures, facilitated the task of the continuators, who have only had for many parts of their work to publish texts already but little delayed by their predecessors.

I do not wish to enter here upon a criticism of the plan of the Bollandists or that of their successors. Among the censures of every kind which were not spared to the first editors (during the twenty years their work was under the blow of a condemnation by the Spanish Inquisition), some were at least frivolous; as those of the Carmelites, who considered the book heretical, because it denied their institution the glory of being descended in a direct line from the prophet Elias; others seem to us at the present day fairly well founded. It is to be regretted, for example, that they should have preferred the artificial and arbitrary order of the calendar to classification by epochs, and, in the midst of each epoch, by nationalities. The saints indeed, like all truly original productions, show their native soil, and bear the deep imprints of their time and country. Very often the laborious compilers do not sufficiently distinguish the age of the documents, and give an authority which they do not deserve to the translations of the thirteenth century, an epoch when the composition of the lives of the saints had become a regular trade, and was reduced to a wearisome repetition of the same formulas and the same miracles. A reproach much more serious which we can apply to them is that of constantly preferring to the part of editors, for which they were so well prepared, that of critics, which they could not conveniently fulfil. In reproducing the legends, they cut out sometimes that which offended them, and that which

offended them is often that which interests us the most. They expatiate artlessly on the miracles, which they ought either to admit or reject, and they do not see that by their method they do too much or too little. They do too much for simple faith, which requires no reasoning, and proceeds by all other ways but that of criticism. They do too little for the independent critic, who has many other requirements, and is not content with timid concessions. Thus their collection, instead of being admitted without objection by all the world, as a collection of documents made without system and without party spirit ought to be, has not satisfied them at all: the believer, who seeks in it an object of faith, comes to maintain it obstinately against all objections; the pious man, who seeks in it food for his piety, and finds every moment some gravel which grates against his teeth; the artist, who looks for legends and poetry and finds dissertations, what M. de Montalembert elsewhere called the acid of reasoning; lastly, the historian and pure critic, who, instead of sincere texts, finds collected texts discussed, and sometimes mutilated, in an interest which is not that of high and impartial truth.

We cannot say that the continuators of the Bollandist collection have attained that which they could have done in view of the defects in the plan of their predecessors. It is not at a moment of religious reaction like that which we passed through some years ago that we ought to expect disinterested criticism. That lofty indifference which is the true scientific spirit was difficult for the Catholics of the seventeenth century; it is absolutely impossible for the Catholics of our day. At every step the new editors slide into polemics. Instead of offering us, free from discussion, a series of documents precious to all, their pages are filled with dissertations which have often only a sectarian value, and sometimes bitter controversies, which I fear will convert no one. This defect produces another not less serious

in a collection of this kind. I would say a fearful proximity. The two volumes of continuation which have now been prepared give the events of six days only. St. Theresa occupies half a volume to herself alone. It is certainly not too much for this admirable saint, but it is clear that, with such a method of procedure, the proportions, already so vast, of the first Bollandists are broken up and surpassed. I hasten to say it at once: these objections, were they twenty times more serious than they really are, would not detract in any way from the immense interest of the collection of the *Acta Sanctorum*. It seems to me that for a true philosopher a prison cell with these fifty-five volumes in folio would be a true Paradise. We can say that among the legends which fill them (M. Guizot has taken the trouble to count them,<sup>1</sup> and has found them to be 25,000), there is not one which has not its interest, and does not merit, either on one side or the other, the attention of the thoughtful.

What an incomparable gallery, indeed, that of these 25,000 heroes of a disinterested life! What an air of lofty distinction! what nobility! what poetry! There are the humble and the great, the learned and the simple, the obscure and the illustrious, but I do not know a single one with a vulgar air. All seems to me such as Giotto poses, grandiose, bold, severed from earthly ties, and already transfigured. They please the positive sense but little, I admit; never would they understand political economy. We cannot say that societies which have possessed many saints have been the most prosperous or the best organised. But they have, after all, understood life better than those who embrace it as a narrow calculation of interest, as an insignificant contest of ambition and vanity! Doubtless it would have been better not to have placed their ideal in such a cloudy height, where, in order to contemplate it we must take such a bent position; but we find the great

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire de la Civilisation en France*, xvii. leçon.



instincts of human nature more easily distinguishable in their sublime folly than in the ordinary business of life which has never been penetrated by the ray divine. This is why rich and happy countries produce such a few saints, while sad and poor countries have produced so many. Brittany and Ireland have produced thousands; Normandy has not produced one—at least, the Norman race. We find very few among the citizen class and those who exercise what are called liberal professions; all are bishops or monks, warriors or hermits, kings or beggars. There are, I believe, one or two holy doctors, but their legends are apocryphal. Brittany alone has the privilege of adopting a holy lawyer, St. Yves; and yet the popular conscience protested against the intrusion, and revenged itself by singing on his festival, “*Advocatus et non latro, res miranda populo!*”

Indeed, if there is a work profoundly popular, it is the secret work which creates the saint before the Papacy have granted to him the exclusive privilege of canonisation. The crowd exercise on it all their instincts, and do not confer this high title except on their favourites. Hence the essentially democratic character of the greater part of the saints, redressers of grievances, defenders of the weak, haughty and firm before the powerful. Hence also the astonishing diversity of origin which appears at first sight among the body of the happy. They are all there in this popular pantheon: martyrs of a cherished cause—ancient forgotten heroes—characters of romance. Roland, William of Aquitaine, the ladies of King Arthur’s court, end their career in sanctity. It is that the people love the great and noble before all. Easy and smooth upon many points, they canonise their old acquaintances for their good looks; that which is merely honest and sensible does not affect them; they do not judge them by considerations of utility and reason, but by their grand appearance.

M. Guizot has thoroughly established that the legends of the saints were the true literature of the first half of the Middle Ages, and served as the food for intellectual, moral, and even æsthetic life at that time. We feel a degree of emotion in thinking how many simple souls this kind of reading has consoled, how many pale and monotonous lives it has given colour to, what an immense amount of weariness it has relieved. During that long night of winter which passed over humanity from the sixth to the tenth century, the world of the saints was an ideal opposed to the sad reality—a sort of Astrea, the dream of a world of morality and sweetness, where the feeble and the humble had their revenge against the strong and violent world—a revolt of the imagination against the insupportable uniformity of life. My learned friend, M. Alfred Maury, has shown admirably well how the lives of the saints, in another view, are the true mythology of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> One God, supreme, unapproachable, is indeed a dogma too austere for certain epochs and for certain countries. Driven from God, mythology took refuge among the saints. Around the saints an inferior religion was entirely formed, which more than once has been able to obscure the devotion to God the Father, but which, on the other hand, has brought to monotheism that which was wanting in the picturesque and in variety.

It is because they are the reflex of the religious instincts of each race that the saints offer such different and topical physiognomies. In Syria, Stylites, and verging towards Buddhism; in Italy, free livers, and savouring of the neighbourhood of the *Frati Gaudenti*; in Ireland, adventurers and sea-rovers. The aspect of the places is almost always the best commentary on the lives of the saints. We do not thoroughly understand St. Francis d'Assisi until we have seen Umbria and Mount Ubaldo. The ter-

<sup>1</sup> *Essai sur les Légendes Pieuses du Moyen Age.* Paris, 1843.

rible, the strange, and, at times, entrancing legends of Cologne have not their full value except in that grand religious centre of Germany in the Middle Ages. We have often repeated that in Paganism each nation made their gods according to their fancy: in Christianity, where God is no longer to be made, it is by the saints that each epoch and each country has given its measure, and in some sort its moral portrait. It is true that the legends of a people are more expressive than their history in this sense, that they afford a more faithful image of their being and their moral aptitudes than is to be had from the point of view of history and of the study of human nature, the interest of a collection destined to present to us the series of types under which the different branches of the Christian family have in turn conceived the ideal.

The saints in general have undergone the vicissitudes of saints, with some differences, however, for the same epochs are far from being equally favourable to the development of the two sexes. The Middle Ages, which have so many admirable saints, has few truly distinguished saints before St. Catherine of Siena. The brilliant epoch of saints, in my opinion, is from the fourth to the sixth century; the Christian ladies of that time, Monica, Paola, Eustachia, Radegunda, have a very particular charm. The virgin martyrs certainly deserve the palm among their celestial companies, if criticism did not too often reduce their histories to charming little romances. But what ingenious combinations have presided at the creation of these legends! What delicate æstheticism in this association of faith, youth, and death! Ancient art has drawn spiritually analogous contrasts from the myth of the Amazons; but antiquity, stranger to our religious refinements, could conceive nothing so delicate as this theological firmness in the young girl. In general, the legends of the martyrs, which require from the historical point of



view the most severe control, are distinguished by a prodigious wealth of invention. After love, it is the martyr who has furnished poetry with the most diverse combinations. In the imaginations of the punishment there is I know not what sombre and strange pleasure that humanity relished with delight during those ages. The Roman Christian did not at first know any other object of interest. At Rome on Mount Cœlius, near St. Etienne-le-Rond, or the Four Crowns, we are just at the point for embracing this great cycle of legends and understanding the new feelings which find in it such a rich and beautiful expression.

I have spoken of the qualities of the saints ; in order to be complete, I should have said something about their defects. All are great, but all are not equally good : sometimes they seem terrible, absolute, and vindictive. All were admirable poets ; but ordinarily they passed beyond the measure and alarmed us by their exaltation. This is why their soul was so often sad and desolate. The greater part of them had suffered much ; for everything which is grand and lofty brings with it its own punishment, and is punished by its very grandeur in leaving the common ways of humanity. The moment of the triumph of the saints is truly that of their death. Their life, appreciated according to our modern ideas, seems imperfect in this sense, that they have been exclusive ; that they have only seen things from one side ; they have wanted criticism and breadth of mind. I would not wish for their life, but I am jealous of their death. To see the glorious and calm end, the soul relieved and strengthened, we regain our respect for human nature, and we persuade ourselves that this nature is noble, and that it has some ground for being proud of it.

There lies the secret of the contagious charm which the reading of the *Vie des Saints* has always exercised over

strong souls. Ignatius de Loyola only read that and *Amadis of Gaul*. In moments of weariness and depression, when the soul, wounded by the vulgarity of the modern world, seeks in the past the nobility it can no longer find in the present, nothing is more valuable than the *Vie des Saints*. Then those who please the most, those are the most useless, the pure ascetics. See them at Pisa, in the Campo-Santo, in the admirable fresco of Laurati, then read the fine pages that Fleury has consecrated in his *Histoire Ecclésiastique* to the origins of the solitary life. The *Vie des Pères du Désert*, which they read at Port-Royal during the hours of recreation, is also a great and austere romance. The ordinary inanimate style of Port-Royal ought only to find colour to paint the Thebaid. I only know certain Buddhist legends which approach these serious and simple narratives.

A thought occurs upon which we cannot stay without sadness, but which seems an inevitable consequence from what we are about to say; it is that there will not be any more saints. I will explain: The race of the children of God is eternal, and our age, so poor in great things, is not more disinherited than any other with regard to beautiful and good souls. But those saints according to the old form, those grand statues so proudly placed, those lofty representations of the ideal divine side of human nature, those will be seen no more; it is a kind of completed poetry, like many others. There will be saints canonised at Rome, but they will no longer be canonised by the people. It is a saddening thing, the thin, scanty, mean, and insignificant air of all modern saints—St. Liguori,<sup>1</sup> for example. Evidently the faculty which created legends has departed from humanity. The sixteenth century marks in this respect the limit of grand style and good taste. This

<sup>1</sup> His principle was that in order to become a saint it was enough to obtain as many indulgences as possible.

extraordinary age had still some admirable saints. Loyola is certainly a harsh and formidable personage, but what power! what enthusiasm! what a fresh and complete personification of his epoch and his country! Here then is a saint of the old school, a saint worthy of Zurbaran or of Espagnolet. Compare with this giant the honest and excellent Vincent de Paul, the one with the other: an immense revolution has been accomplished. In the place of a sublime enthusiast, whom the greatness of his passion elevates to genius, we find a golden soul, who knew no other poetry than that of doing good, no other theology than charity. This is the best, without doubt, and more pleasing to God for the good of humanity than all the saints could show until now. But for loftiness and grandeur, what a difference! We can defy art to treat with any degree of loftiness this good and mild figure. This is not a saint suspended between heaven and earth, visited by angels, and whose every step is marked with miracles; this is a modern man, reduced to natural proportions, struggling like any other in the midst of the difficulties of life, and not performing any other miracles than those of his immense activity and inexhaustible devotion.

What are we to conclude from this? That the saints have diminished in size like the rest of mankind; that goodness is more and more replacing grandeur; that the world shrinks in proportion as it is put in order; that the reign of great originality and great poetry is at an end. It is certain that evil is not so strong in our days as it was formerly; but, on the other hand, it is certain that great individualities have no longer a place in the world such as tends to make them. Elevated art, which lives only in strongly pronounced types, is obliged to seek refuge in the past, in the world of heroes and saints. I regret that it is not permitted to me to show all this by some examples borrowed from the volumes about to be published by the



new Bollandists. Perhaps I shall do so another time in saying some words on that extraordinary woman who occupies so great a place in their collection. The illustrious example of St. Theresa will teach us on what evidence the title of saint is conferred. What power of will, what originality of mind, almost always supposed, but also at the price of what formidable stake that qualification was obtained, who was confined so often in the cell of the heretic and the castaway. How many religious Spaniards have wished to do that which St. Theresa has done, and have succumbed to the Inquisition! Theresa was holy because she was stronger than her directors; she was able to impose her faith upon them and carry away her proper guides. This is the spectacle to which the first part of vol. vii. of the new *Acta* assists us; and such is the interest of this narrative, that, notwithstanding its 680 pages in folio, we should not dream for a moment of charging it with prolixity.

*THE AUTHOR OF THE 'IMITATION OF  
JESUS CHRIST.'*

It is an immense advantage for a book destined to popularity that it should be anonymous. Obscurity of origin is the condition of fascination; a too clear view of the author detracts from the book, and makes us perceive, in spite of ourselves, that behind the finest passages a writer has been occupied in polishing the phrases and combining the incidents. In showing in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* not so much the product of the dreams of a poet composing with sequence and reflection, but the impersonal creation of the epic genius of Greece, Wolf has fulfilled the first condition for a serious admiration of Homer. The charm of the Bible partly comes from this, that the author of each book is so often unknown. How many portions which form the second part of the Book of Isaiah, "Rise up, shine, Jerusalem . . ." seems to us more beautiful when we see it in the cry of an unknown prophet; perhaps the grandest of all, announcing during the captivity, the future glory of Sion. The perfection is precisely that the author has forgotten himself, that he has neglected to sign, or that his book has answered so completely to the thought of the epoch, that humanity itself, if we might say so, substituted in his place, would have adopted as its own the pages that it recognises as having been inspired.

The critic, whose requirements are far from being always in accord with those of artless admiration, does not stay before such considerations. The more the author is hidden,

the more the critic persists in penetrating the mystery of the great anonymous work. Sometimes it would be matter of regret if he succeeded in tearing away the veil which formed part of its beauty, but oftentimes historic circumstances are revealed which assist us in placing the anonymous work in its natural position, and restoring to it the first significance, far better than the significant syllables of a proper name.

The book which, under the defective title of *Imitation of Jesus Christ*,<sup>1</sup> has attained so extraordinary a fortune, has exercised more than any other the sagacity of the learned. The history of various literature does not perhaps afford any work of which the authorship has been so effaced. The author has not left any trace of himself behind him; time and place do not exist for him. We might say an inspiration from on high has not crossed the conscience of a man to bring it to pass. Since the absolutely impersonal narratives of the first Evangelists, no voice, so completely free from all individual attachment, has ever spoken to man, of God and his duty towards him.

Of the three principal authors for whom has been claimed the honour of having composed this admirable book, A'Kempis, Gerson, and the Benedictine Jean Gersen, Abbé of Verceil, the last, whose claim was rejected from the first as chimerical, has seen his case grow great all of a sudden by a succession of unexpected discoveries, and, above all, by the impossibilities which an attentive critic

<sup>1</sup> One of its most ancient titles is *Consolations Intérieures*. The actual title proceeds from the rubric of the first chapter, which, by a common abuse in the Middle Ages, has been applied to the whole of the four books. It is thus that certain songs of exploits are called *Enfances*, because they begin with the narrative of the marvellous infancy of the hero. The unity of the book of the *Imitation*, and the transformation to which it could have been submitted, require a severe examination. Upon this subject we ought to read the learned preface that M. Victor Le Clerc has placed at the head of the splendid edition printed at the Imprimerie Impériale for the Universal Exhibition.



has revealed in the hypotheses. M. Paravia, professor of the University of Turin, has just published a new statement of case in favour of his fellow-countryman.<sup>1</sup> If he does not add any fact to those which have been so laboriously collected in the same sense, M. De Gregory has at least the merit of separating the false reasoning and the digressions by which this patient collector has injured his cause. We can only regret that the last defender of the pretensions of Verceil has not known better than his predecessors to keep himself above the habitual defect of the Italian critic—I would say of that national vanity so out of place in history, which inspires the reader with a sort of distrust of the best deduced proofs and the most decisive reasoning.

For my own part, I admit the perception of M. Paravia as very probable, above all in his negative conclusions against Gerson and A'Kempis. The opinion which attributes the book of the Imitation to Gerson is on all points unsustainable. This book does not appear in the list of writings of the Chancellor prepared by his own brother. A personage so celebrated in his lifetime could not, had he wished it, have kept anonymous, a book which attained renown so quickly, in an age, too, when publicity was already so extended. There is, besides, a strange contrast between the rough scholar, whose life was occupied with so many contests, and the disgusted peaceful man who wrote these pages, full of sweetness and artless *abandon*. A man mixed up in all the controversies of his time would never have known how to find such delicate and penetrating tones. The politician preserves even in his retirement his habits of restless activity; there is a certain delicacy of conscience which business irrevocably tarnishes, and we scarcely ever find, at least in the past, a work distinguished by moral sentiment which is the production of the leisure of a statesman. Gerson, living retired among the Celes-

<sup>1</sup> *Dell' Autore del Libro De Imitatione Christi.* Torino, 1853.

tines of Lyons, continued to occupy himself with all the quarrels of the age; and we know that, on his brother asking him in his last days to compose for the community a moral treatise drawn from Holy Scripture, he could not bring it to an end.

I do not wish to speak ill of the extraordinary man who bore so proudly in his time, the authority of the Gallican Church and the University of Paris; but evidently the author of the treatise *De Auferibilitate Papæ* has nothing in common with the author of the Imitation. This one had tasted of the world, it is true, and without that would he have found such delicate accents to speak of its vanity? But everything leads us to believe that he retired from life early. "When I wandered far from thee, thou hast brought me to serve thee. . . . What shall I return thee for this kindness?" Of the trial which he made of the world, there remains in his work neither regrets nor bitterness, but consummate experience and wisdom. "We everywhere feel," says M. Michelet, "a powerful maturity, a sweet and rich savour of autumn; it has no more of the sharpness of young passion. We must, in order to have arrived at this point, have loved well once, then ceased to love, and then loved again." Nothing less Gallican, nothing less of the university than this book. What do we think of it? This charming flower bloomed amidst the paving-stones of the Sorbonne! The protests of the soul against the subtleties of the school would be a game in the abode of the *ergo*. That Gerson, the dialectician above all—Gerson, the enemy of the religious orders, the foe of the mystics, the representative of Gallican harshness, should have found in his soul, hardened by syllogisms, the sweetest inspirations of monachal life! What is more impossible? Let us add that the style of Gerson is barbarism quite scholastic; that of the Imitation is doubtless not Latin, but it is full of charm. It is a language apart, which we must take for

what it is; hardly classic, but admirably suited to show the fine shades of inner life and feeling.

The hypothesis of Thomas A'Kempis is scarcely more acceptable than that of Gerson, although it includes, from other points of view, a certain amount of truth. The formula which is to be found at the end of the Antwerp manuscript, "*Finitus et completus per manus Fratris Thomæ, anno Domini 1441,*" indicates certainly the hand of the copyist or of the compiler, but not that of the author. However, fame has not been merely capricious in the honour which she has given to the scribe of Zwoll. The truth is, as it seems to me, that Thomas A'Kempis was the author, not of the book itself, but of the unheard-of fashion which it has obtained from the second half of the fifteenth century throughout all Christendom. A'Kempis composed a collection of ascetic little works, at the head of which he placed the four books as a distinct treatise, until then but little known, which became, under the title of the *Imitation of Jesus Christ*, the code of religious life. This collection was very much appreciated in the Low Countries and upon the banks of the Rhine. Many communities wished to have copies of it made from the book written by Brother Thomas. In one sense the pious A'Kempis has, then, veritable rights in the book of the Imitation. He did not compose it, but he included it; and we can say that, without him, this production, so characteristic of Christian mysticism, would have been lost, or we should have remained ignorant of it. Thus the Middle Ages have some characters among the copyists altogether amiable, who attain, by their studious habits, to a fairly great intellectual nobility. The sweet and honest soul of that good scribe who declared that he had sought rest everywhere, and had only found it with a little book in a little corner (*in angello cum libello*), was worthy of responding, across two ages of forgetfulness, to the equally pure but more lofty soul of the



unknown ascetic, whose destiny would not have been complete if it had not been preluded by obscurity from the incomparable splendour which the future had reserved for him.

It is not one of the least singularities of the history of the Imitation, that we should have to be reminded of the Revolution of July with reference to the discovery which has thrown the greatest light upon its origin. On the 4th of August 1830, M. De Gregory, led by curiosity to the Place du Louvre, went into Techener's shop, and on the shelves of the library, beloved by bibliophiles, found an ancient manuscript of his favourite book, which had belonged for many generations to the Avogadri of Cerioni, in Piedmont. Some paleographers, too complaisant, will perhaps affirm to the fortunate author of the godsend that the manuscript could not be later than the year 1300. Doubt is very permissible in this respect. Nevertheless the manuscript drew attention to the Avogadri, and brought about the discovery of a family journal which bore a note of the date of February 15, 1349, from which it appeared that the precious volume had been possessed long since by the Avogadri as a hereditary treasure.<sup>1</sup> When we have got an exact idea of what was a book in the Middle Ages, we willingly admit that the manuscript of the Avogadri could have been almost unique for a long period, and that the work might have been the nearly exclusive property of some religious houses in sub-alpine

<sup>1</sup> "*Post divisionem factam cum fratre meo Vincentio, qui Ceridonii habitat, in signum fraterni amoris . . . dono ille pretiosum codicem de Imitatione Christi, quod ab agnatibus meis longa manu teneo nam nonnulli antenates mei hujus jam recordarunt.*" Let us add, nevertheless, that this text responds so well to the requirements of the cause, maintained with a warmth of bad taste by M. De Gregory, that we cannot prevent ourselves from entertaining some doubts as to its authenticity. It would be as well that the journal should be kept at Bielle, and studied by an impartial paleographer and altogether examined.

Italy until the commencement of the fifteenth century, the epoch when Gerson, and, above all, A'Kempis, established its celebrity. On the other hand, a sufficiently great number of ancient manuscripts attribute the work to an Abbé, *Jean Gesen, Gessen, Gersen, or Jean de Cabanac*. The name of Gersen does not cover the whole difficulty, since we can clearly show that it is only an alteration of the name of Gerson. But the name of *Jean de Cabanac* we cannot suppose a mistake, and which we read in many manuscripts in the Imperial Library, is altogether decisive, and it is evidently from this name the critic should have set out from the first. But *Cabanacum* or *Cabaliacum* is probably Cavaglia in the province of Bielle, where the name of Gersen, Garsen, Garson is preserved in many families to this day. As we find elsewhere a Jean Gersen, Abbé of Saint-Etienne de Verceil, at the beginning of the thirteenth century, we happen with sufficient probability on the personage so long and so curiously sought after. Fortunately it does not for all remain less mysterious, for we only know the syllables of the name of Gersen, and nothing will disturb the imagination in the idle fancies it may indulge in respecting this pious unknown.

However that may be, two important results would appear hereafter, as acquired relative to the subject which now occupies our attention. At first, the book is of the thirteenth century, of the flower of the Middle Ages, and not of their decadence. We ought to have guessed it, for even the text would have shown it. Nothing sad, cold, or pallid, like that end of the Middle Ages which from 1300 to 1450 lingered while waiting for the great awakening. The Imitation does not belong to that sombre epoch, full of discontent, aspirations, and wrath. The griefs of Holy Mother Church, the reform of the chief and the members, the grand lamentations upon the whore of Babylon, the Apocalypse invoked against the simoniacal Pope of Avig-



non, these are the habitual thoughts of the contemporaries of the Councils of Constance and Basle. Nothing of all that in the Imitation. We see there a peaceful hermit, happy in his own thoughts, tranquil on the fate of the Church, without any apprehensions as to the future of the world. His disgust is not that which succeeds great epochs, and which is so obvious towards 1350. It is rather that of an epoch less plagued and the prelude of great activity. Scholastic divinity was already born, but it had not spread everywhere; the soul still preserved its rights. The scholastic divinity against which the excellent Abbé protests is not that of the second period, represented by St. Thomas, accepted by the Church, and identified with theology to such a point, that a cardinal dared to say that something would have been wanting to the dogma of the Church if Aristotle had not lived. The scholastic divinity which excites the antipathy of this delicate and charming spirit is that of the Realists and the Nominalists, that of Abelard and of William de Champeaux, the *scientia clamorosa* of the mountain Sainte-Genevieve, entirely occupied with definitions, genera, and species.<sup>1</sup> The discipline of the school beginning from the end of the thirteenth century had become so absolute that no one was able to bear it: not a voice was raised against it until the Renaissance. The German mystics, Eckard, Tauler, Henri Suso, who alone had seen the emptiness of this science of an abstract withered God, had undergone its influence like the others. They cited Aristotle, Averroes; they had drunk from all sorts of impure sources. With the author of the Imitation, on the contrary, we find a virgin thought which has never been solved by any profane contact. In the Bible, the Fathers, the saints, we see the whole reading of this pious ascetic. I dare say that such a book could only have been written by St. Thomas, and with his habits of

<sup>1</sup> Liv. I. iii. : "Quid curæ nobis de generibus et speciebus."



pedantry, which the teaching in fashion had caused every mind in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to contract.

Religious life, as it appears in the book of the Imitation, carries us back to the first half of the thirteenth century. That life still displays the Benedictine physiognomy; the complaints of the author and his views of reform revolve in a circle of ideas very analogous to those of St. Bernard. No trace of the immense revolution accomplished in the religious life by the mendicant Orders. When the author wishes to cite to his brethren models of youthful Orders in all their fervour, he cites the foundations of the eleventh and twelfth centuries—the Carthusians and the Cistercians. We have here evidently the last voice of monachism in its old and pure form, before the radical transformation it underwent in the middle of the thirteenth century; a life tranquil and free enough—no mean practices—holiness in the soul, and not on the outside. Once, it is true (Book III., chap. 1.), we find cited the *humble St. Francis*. But this passage, which is suspected of being an interpolation, would be far from moving against our thesis. After 1250, when St. Francis had become a second Christ, a sort of incarnation, a sun arising out of Assisi, like another kind of Ganges (Dante, *Paradise*, chap. xi.), such an epithet we scarcely understand. We remark elsewhere that the cited words are not textual, and seem to have been hearsay. In 1215 the patriarch of the Mendicants went over to Verceil. Gersen ought to be then Abbé of St. Etienne. Perhaps he saw the already celebrated saint, and gathered from his mouth this word, which remained engraven in his memory.

A second result, which appears very probable, is that the book of the Imitation was originally from Italy. It has the genius, not very profound, but clear, free from abstract speculation, but marvellously appropriate to the researches of practical philosophy. High transcendental mysticism never prevailed much in Italy. The direction of enthu-

siasm is above all political and moral. Compared to St. Theresa, St. Catherine of Siena, the great mystic of Italy, is in reality a thoroughly political personage. To reconcile the towns, to negotiate between the Guelphs and the Ghibelines, to adjudge the pretensions of the rival Popes, to defend the interests of Siena,—such was her life. From Petrarch to Manzoni and Pellico we find in Italy an uninterrupted series of subtle and distinguished souls, moderately ambitious in philosophy, but very delicate in morality, at the head of whom I like to place the author of the *Imitation*. He belongs rather to the spiritual family of John of Parma and Ubertain of Casale, who, leaving the mysterious Abbé of Calabria, Joachim de Flore, desired, under the banner of the Eternal Gospel, to join the Order of St. Francis, and continue in Italy during the Middle Ages the worship of free conscience.

On the other hand, the Low Countries and the Rhenish Provinces were as it were predestined by the tranquil mysticism which inspired them to become a second country for the *Imitation*. Created by Italy, it should from the beginning have been appreciated in the country of Ruysbroek, Gerard Groot, and A'Kempis. We may be permitted to say that this book has nothing French about it. France has never been convinced of the vanity of the world. She has never even considered the subject except as a common-place phrase in fine oratory. Exact and solid meaning of the things of the earth, this is her share. France is not, by her essential character, either poetical or mystical; the essence of poetry and mysticism consists in being beyond the world; but the French mind is altogether in the most perfect harmony with the proportions of our planet; it has estimated the dimensions at a glance, and does not go beyond them.

When we seek the origin of this idea of the vanity of the world which has become the foundation of mystic

Christianity, we are led to find it the first expression in the Book of Ecclesiastes; but the Book of Ecclesiastes belongs by its style to the lowest epochs of the Hebrew language, and is without doubt posterior to the captivity. It is then a relatively modern idea, connected on one side with the character of the Semitic race, which takes everything after an egotistic and personal fashion, and on the other with the defective curiosity and the inferiority of the scientific faculties of that same race. We suppose that Solomon, after having exhausted science, power, and pleasure, arrived at this final conclusion: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity." Never did a like idea occur to Indo-European people, to the Greeks, or to the Romans, for example, who took life without any after-thought, and were ignorant until their conversion to Jewish and Christian ideas of the malady of disgust. Christianity caused this sentiment to become prevalent all at once, and made it one of the most essential elements of its eloquence. After the fifth century the world lived on these words, "Vanity of vanities. . . . One thing only is necessary." The Imitation is doubtless the most perfect and the most attractive expression of this great and poetic system, but the modern mind will only accept it with considerable reserve.

Mysticism overlooked that essential element in human nature, curiosity, which makes man penetrate the secret of things, and become through science, according to the saying of Leibnitz, the mirror of the universe. Ecclesiastes says respecting our day, "Nothing new under the sun . . . that which is, is that which has been; that which has been, is that which will be." Ecclesiastes had only seen one well-reduced point of the universality of things; he took the heavens for a solid roof, and the sun for a globe, suspended some leagues up in the air; history, that other world, had for him no existence. Ecclesiastes had



felt—I am willing to believe this of him—all that the heart of man was capable of feeling, but he did not at all suspect what man is permitted to know. The human mind in his time overwhelmed science; science in our time overwhelms the human mind. I cannot admit that he who knows as poet and as philosopher all that the Academy of Sciences and the Academy des Inscriptions know, or ought to know, can say still: “To increase knowledge is to increase trouble. . . . I have applied my mind to knowledge, and I have seen that it is the worst occupation that God has given to the sons of men.” It seems to me, on the contrary, that the human mind in our day will emerge from the state of marasmus where they have plunged so many mistakes, at first by moral sentiment, which has the privilege to survive in noble natures every deception, then by curiosity, by which propensity, even when abused, we attach ourselves to this world and find it worthy of study and attention.

Yes, without doubt, one thing only is necessary. It is a fine word, which we must accept in its full philosophic extent, as a principle of all spiritual nobility, as an expressive formula, although dangerous in its brevity, of grand morality. But asceticism, in proclaiming this simplification of life, meant the one thing necessary in so narrow a fashion that its principle became at the time an intolerable chain for the human mind. Among the intellectual things which are all holy, we distinguish the sacred and the profane. The profane, thanks to the instincts of Nature, stronger than the principles of an exclusive asceticism, was not entirely banished; they tolerated it, although it was vanity. Sometimes they softened matters, so as to say it was the least vain of vanities; but if they had been consistent, they would have prescribed it without mercy: it was a weakness to which the perfect succumbed. Thus human nature found itself mutilated in its most

elevated part. In reality, there are very few acts in spiritual life entirely profane. One thing only is necessary, but the infinite includes that thing. Everything which has the pure forms of truth, of beauty, of moral goodness for its object—that is to say, in order to take the most sanctified expression by the respects of humanity—God Himself—seen and felt by the understanding of that which is true, and the love of that which is beautiful, all that is sacred, all that is worthy of the passion of beautiful souls. The remainder, we willingly agree with Ecclesiastes, is only vanity and vexation of spirit.

See, that which the author of the Imitation scarcely understood. He never went out of his cell at Verceil. He only read the first line of Aristotle, "*Omnis homo naturaliter scire deciderat*," and he shut the book scandalised. "What does it serve," said he, "to know about things upon which we shall not be examined at the day of judgment?" (Book I. chaps. ii. and iii.). It is there that it is incomplete, but it is there also that it charms us. I should like to be a painter, to show him according to my idea of him, mild and collected, seated in an oaken chair, and in the beautiful costume of the Benedictines of Mount Cassin. Through the trellis of his window we can see the world clothed in azure tint like the miniatures of the fourteenth century: on the first plane a country strewn with light trees, after the style of Perugini; on the horizon, the tops of the Alps covered with snow. Thus I figure him at Verceil, folding the manuscripts now deposited at Dôme, of which many perhaps have passed through his hands.

Monastic life, among much excellent fruit, had the advantage of withdrawing from vulgarity, some choice souls destined for a special mission in moral and religious teaching. Men do not place those high whom they see on their level. In order to exercise upon them a great moral, religious, or even political action, in the lofty sense

of the word, we must not resemble them too much. This cruel gift, which condemns to isolation the man devoted to the worship of an idea, betrays itself early by a certain embarrassment, which makes him appear awkward, out of place, and dull in the midst of others. We see that he lives high, and can scarcely lower himself; he does not know how to speak on common things; his reserve excites among ordinary people a sentiment of respect mingled with a degree of antipathy. Religious life, at the epochs when the beliefs she entertained were fit for cultivated minds, was an excellent asylum for those souls. A person who had passed from the religious to the secular life told me that she was at first struck at meeting outside the cloister, many more lofty and serious minds than they had made her believe, but she was also surprised to find the world in general so common, preoccupied with household cares, and a crowd of things which have no ennobling effect. I would not wish to exaggerate the importance of this kind of spiritual gentility, without which we can very well be useful, and even honest men. But it is certain that in losing the institution of the monastic life, the human mind has lost a great school of originality. The distinction may be equally acquired by an intellectual aristocracy and by solitude. But everything which has contributed to maintain a tradition of moral nobility in humanity is worthy of respect, and, in a sense, of regret, even when the result has been purchased at the expense of many errors and prejudices.



## JEAN CALVIN.

M. JULES BONNET, already known by his excellent works upon the history of the Reformation, and in particular by a very interesting biography of Olympia Morata, has published in two volumes the collection of the French correspondence of Jean Calvin.<sup>1</sup> These precious letters have not until now been collected in a complete manner. "When about to return to God," says Theodore de Beza, "Jean Calvin, always prepossessed with the interests of the Church, recommended to me his treasure, that is to say, a vast mass of papers, desiring that if I should find anything among them useful to the Churches, I should publish it." This wish of the dying apostle was only partially realised in the sixteenth century. The struggles which absorbed all activity of mind, the catastrophes and massacres which closely followed the death of the Reformer, and still more the scruples of respectful admirers, possessed at once with the caution requisite towards contemporaries and respect for a memory which was dear to them, all appeared to conspire to cause an adjournment of the task bequeathed by Calvin to his friends. We no longer have to regret it, for a young and laborious historian has, with the piety of a disciple and the accuracy of an impartial scholar, collected these archives of the nursery of his faith. The work of M. Bonnet leaves only one desire, and that is, that

<sup>1</sup> *Lettres de Jean Calvin, recueillies pour la première fois et publiées d'après les manuscrits originaux.* Lettres Françaises, 2 vols. Paris, C. Meymeis.

the collection of the Latin letters should as soon as possible complete the two volumes now consecrated to the French ones. Would it not be preferable to mould the two classes of letters in a single series, and to present the correspondence of the Reformer in strictly chronological order? We may be permitted to think so. I do not overlook the reasons which have induced the editors to follow another plan; they have thought that the French letters would possess an interest, either literary or pious, for those persons who do not read Latin, but that is a motive which the disinterested will hardly accept. The collection of Calvin's letters is, above all, a historic document; it is to lessen its value when we give it a mere literary interest, and to spoil it when we turn it into a book for encouraging faith.

Is the character of Calvin, as it appears from these new texts, materially different from that which we were permitted to trace from history and those parts of his correspondence already published? It would be some exaggeration to pretend that it is. Calvin was one of those absolute characters cast in one piece, so that one sees the whole of him at a glance: a letter, an act, is sufficient to judge him. There is no fold in that inflexible soul, who never knew doubt or hesitation. The natures which reserve unexpected secrets for history, and which at each posthumous revelation show themselves under new aspects, are those flexible and rich natures which, superior to their action, their destiny, and even to their opinions, are only half disclosed to the world, and have always kept a mysterious side, by which they have maintained a free communication with the infinite. God, who gives up the world to the violent and the strong, almost always denies them that gift of delicacy which alone in speculative matters leads to the truth. Truth rests entirely in the shade; but we who would exercise a powerful action in the world must not look into the shade; we must believe

that we alone are entirely right, and that those who think in any other way are entirely wrong. The delicate mind, free from passion, criticises for itself; it sees the weak sides of its own case, and is tempted occasionally to be of the same opinion as its adversaries. On the contrary, the passionate man, who, absolute in his opinions, boldly identifies his cause with that of God, and proceeds with the audacity which naturally gives that assurance, to him the world belongs, and justly so, for the world only progresses by the impulse of these hard minds; but the delights of thought are denied to him; he does not see the truth in its purified form. Dupe of himself, he dies without having attained wisdom.

This inflexible harshness, which constitutes the essential character of the man of action, Calvin had better than any one. I do not know if we shall find a more complete type of the ambitious man, jealous of making his opinion prevail because he believed it to be true. No care for wealth, titles, or honours; no pomp; a modest life, an apparent humility; everything sacrificed to the longing to make others after his likeness. I scarcely see that Ignatius Loyola could dispute with him the palm for these terrible qualities; but Loyola brought with them Spanish ardour and rapture of imagination which have a beauty of their own. He remained always an old reader of the *Amadis*, pursuing spiritual romance after the manner of worldly chivalry, whilst Calvin had all the hardness of the passion without having any of its enthusiasm. We might call him a sworn interpreter, arrogating to himself a right divine to define what is Christian and anti-Christian. His correspondence, lofty, grave, and stoical, is utterly wanting in charm; we see nothing in it, not even a spontaneous sparkle or a heartfelt accent. His style is the same, firm and nervous, but dry, colourless, and embarrassed, often obscure, doubtless because the terrors and constraint of



the times obliged him to express himself in half words. We see in his Latin letters a more tender side, and that is precisely one of the reasons for which we regret that M. Bonnet has not given the two correspondences together for us to read. In these I see nothing but severity, a serious conviction, a peevish spirit, seeing sin everywhere, understanding life as a penance. For one single moment, at the birth of a child, he tries to smile, but it seems to jar in the strangest manner, and soon he relapses into sadness. "It is a misfortune that I can only be with you for less than half a day to laugh with you in waiting to make the little baby smile, while it laughs and cries in enduring pain. For this is the first note we sound at the commencement of this life, in order to laugh in good earnest when we shall be going out of it."

It is surprising that a man who in his life and in his writings exhibits so little sympathy, was in his age the centre of an immense movement, and that his rough and hard tone should have exercised so much influence upon the spirit of his cotemporaries. As, for example, one of the most distinguished women of his time, Renée de France, in her court at Ferrara, surrounded by the flower of the wits of Europe, was she enamoured of this severe master, and induced by him to enter upon a path which must have been strewn with endless thorns? We only practise this kind of austere seduction when we work truly with opinions, and without that vivid, profound, and sympathetic ardour which was one of the secrets of Luther's fortune, and without the charm and the dangerous softness of Francis de Salis. Calvin succeeded, because he was the most Christian man of his age in an age and country which needed a Christian reaction. His very moroseness was a condition of his success, for seriously religious persons are more easily gained by severity than by relaxation; they prefer the narrow path to the broad and easy ways,

and the surest mode of attaching them is to ask for much without having the appearance of conceding anything. Is it necessary that I should add that, as regards the essential features of uprightness, honesty, and conviction, the correspondence published by M. Bonnet completely clears the Reformer from the calumnies invented by hatred and party spirit? Two letters fabricated by an unskilful forger in order to sully his memory, and which superficial historians since Voltaire, seem to have given the signal to reproduce, are successfully placed in the rank of apocryphal writings. If the argument of M. Bonnet upon this point was not conclusive, it would find a decisive confirmation in the new researches of Mr. Charles Read upon the same subject—researches based upon the comparison of the pretended autographs of Calvin with the writings which came from his hand.<sup>1</sup>

The inevitable consequence of the character and the position of Calvin, was intolerance. Whenever a man is allowed to govern by an opinion which he believes to be the complete absolute truth, and evident to such a degree that he who does not embrace it is either blind or obstinate, such a man is necessarily intolerant. It is at first sight a strange contradiction to find Calvin ardently claiming liberty for himself and his fellows, and refusing it to others. But in reality it is all simple enough: he believed differently from the Catholics, but he believed as absolutely as they did. What we regard as scarcely wrong, like the essence of nascent Protestantism, the liberty to believe, the individual right to create one's own symbol, was scarcely foreseen in the sixteenth century. Doubtless this appeal from the Church to the Scriptures, which was the soul of the Reformation, became in the end the advantage of the critic, and in that sense the first Reformers

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français*, 4th year, 1st book.

were the true ancestors of free thought. But it was without their knowing it, and without their wishing it. The Catholics had said, with some reason, as to the French Revolution, "Act against us, God aiding; it has turned for us." Philosophers can say as much of the Reformation. History affords numerous instances where the doctrines of a party, and the hidden tendencies which that party represents, show themselves thus in complete contradiction. In the quarrel between the Jesuits and the Jansenists, the Jesuits maintained a doctrine more in conformity with reason, and more respectful to liberty than that of their adversaries; yet Jansenism was at the bottom, a liberal movement, to which it was thought the most honest and the most enlightened men would have rallied.

This violent zeal, which induces the convert to procure the salvation of souls by means of violent struggling, without regard to the interests of freedom, shines throughout the letters of Calvin. Writing to the Regent of England during the minority of Edward VI., "As I understand my Lord, you have two kinds of mutineers who have risen against the King and the Estates of the kingdom: the one are fanciful people, who, under colour of the Gospels, would throw everything into confusion, the other are people pertinaciously adhering to the superstitions of the Roman Antichrist. All of them together well deserve to be repressed by the sword which has been intrusted to you unless they attach themselves, not only to the King, but to God, who has placed him on the royal seat, and has committed to you the protection as much of his person as of his majesty." The model which he proposes to him, and later on to the King of England, is that of the sainted King Josiah, whom God praised for having abolished and *scraped* everything which only served to nourish superstition. The example which he made them fear is that of the kings who having suppressed idolatry but not having



scraped up everything, are blamed for not having suppressed the chapels and places of foolish devotion. Like the Catholics, Calvin did not claim toleration in the name of liberty, but in the name of truth. When he induces the civil magistrates to be hard upon the incorrigibles who despise spiritual punishment and who profess new dogmas, the idea does not for a moment occur to him that the same principle could be turned against his own people; and wishing to defend himself from the murder of Servetus, he writes without knitting his brows this terrible title, "*Defensio orthodoxæ fidei . . . ubi ostenditur hæreticos jure gladii coercendos esse.*"

This violence did not then astonish any one, and was in some sort the common usage. Bolsec forcibly expelled from Geneva, Gruet beheaded, Gentili only temporarily escaping the scaffold by retractation, Servetus undergoing his atrocious punishment under the eyes of Farel, are not isolated instances. Sourness and menace result, as a natural sentiment, from the pen of Calvin. Knowing partly what a man he was, he writes to one Madame De Cany respecting some unknown person, "I should have wished that he had been buried in a ditch, if this had been according to my wish, *et sa venue me rejouit autant comme qui m'eust navré le cœur d'un poignart, . . .* and I assure you, madame, that if he had not escaped so soon, in order to acquit myself of my duty, *il n'eust pas tenu à moy qu'il ne fust passé par le feu.*" Here we recognise the terrible frankness of him who wrote respecting Servetus, "*Si venerit, modo valeat mea auctoritas, vivum exire non patiar,*" who himself furnished to the Inquisition of Vienne proofs against that unfortunate, and caused to be sent to the Archbishop of Lyons the leaves of the book which should have served to light his wood pile.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See the fine study of M. E. Saisset upon Servetus in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* February and March 1848.

Even death did not appease him. Three years after the execution of Gruet, they found in a garret an autograph work in which the rebel Canon expressed, with rage and despair, the thoughts which in better times he would have had the right to publish with calmness and wisdom. Calvin, not thinking that this writing was sufficiently punished by the death of its author, had it burned by the hand of the public executioner, and set it up himself for censure. In place of the pity called for by the dreams of an exasperated spirit revenging itself for the constraint by violence of language, he had only wrath for that which he called blasphemy so execrable that no human creature ought to hear it without trembling. This unfortunate, devoted to death by fatality, guilty of having said in bad style, according to the sixteenth century, what would have been in good style according to the nineteenth century, is to him the adherent of an infected and more than diabolical sect, "... disgorging such execrations as to make every one's hair stand on end, and which are so stinking as to render the whole country accursed, such that every person having a conscience ought to ask pardon of God, for that his name has been so blasphemed among them."

The severity of Calvin in that which affects private morals astonishes and wounds us perhaps still more than that which was dictated by orthodoxy. Too much excited to make human liberty cheap, and preoccupied exclusively with the reform of manners, he mistook altogether the notion of the State, and made Geneva a sort of theocratic republic, governed by ministers, and where the Inquisition extended to the whole life. *L'état des âmes* prevailed in Geneva during the sixteenth century as in Italy in our day. An annual house-to-house visitation was established, to interrogate the inhabitants as to their faith, to distinguish the ignorant, and accustom them to the faithful. The most bitter irony appeared under the

pen of the Reformer against that party of the *libertines* who made an impotent opposition to these severities. "There have been some few menaces and murmurs from the debauched people who cannot bear chastisement. Even the wife of him who ought to have gone to see you (Amedée Perrin), and wrote you from Berne that he had risen up so haughtily, it was necessary that she should have run away, for she has done no good in the town. The others lower their heads instead of raising their horns. There is one of them (Gruet) who is in danger of paying his reckoning very dearly. I do not know if life will not stop there. It seems to be the opinion of the young people that I press them too much, but if the bridle was not held tight it would be a pity. Thus we must provide for their good, notwithstanding what they have. And otherwise true it is that Satan has matches enough here; but the flame will go out like that of tow. The capital punishment which has overtaken one of their companions (Gruet) has made them lower their horns. As to your host (Amedée Perrin), I do not know what appearance he will make to us on his return. However, his wife was such a shrew, that it was unavoidable she should have run away. It is now about two months since he has been absent. He should purr mildly on his return."

Let us hasten to say it—it would be the greatest injustice to judge the character of Calvin by these severities. Moderation and tolerance, although the highest virtues in times of criticism like ours, are not those of an age governed by ardent and absolute convictions. Persuaded that a sound belief is the supreme good, beside which earthly existence is of small account, and assured that he exclusively possesses the truth, each party is bound to be inexorable towards all the others. Hence a terrible reciprocity. The man who makes but small account of his own existence and is ready to give it for his faith, is easily tempted to



make but small account of that of others. Human life, of which, in temperate epochs, we show ourselves so justly careful, is then sacrificed with fearful prodigality. The abominable excesses of 1793 can only be explained as being one of those crises when human life falls, if I dare say so, to a low price. A sort of frenzy seizes upon men's minds; they receive and they give death with an equal coldness. Let us picture to ourselves the state of exaltation in which a fervent disciple of the Reformation would be living when the news of the tortures undergone by his co-religionists arrived from Paris, from Lyons, and from Chambery. History has not insisted sufficiently upon the atrocity of these persecutions, and upon the resignation, courage, and serenity of those who underwent them. There are some pages of it worthy of the first ages of the Church, and I do not doubt but that a simple penetrating narrative, composed from the writings and letters of the time, of those sublime struggles would quite equal the ancient martyrology in beauty. The voice of Calvin in these moments of trial attains a plenitude, a loftiness truly admirable. His letters to the martyrs of Lyons, of Chambery, to the prisoners of Châtelet, seem like an echo of the heroic times of Christianity, of pages torn from the writings of Tertullian or of Cyprian. I confess that before I was introduced by M. Bonnet into the bloody inner life of these martyrs, I had not understood either the nobility of the victims or the cruelty of their executioners. Other persecutions have doubtless been more murderous: Philip II. shed more blood; what persecutor pales beside the Duke of Alva? But it was faith at least that lighted the piles and set up the scaffolds in Spain and in the Low Countries. These hecatombs offered to the truth (that is to say, to that which they believed to be so) have their grandeur, and we ought only to half pity those who fell in that great struggle, where each one fought for his God: faith immolated them

as faith sustained them. But that Sardanapalus (that is the name under which Francis I. figures in Calvin's correspondence), in order to serve his political interests or to prevent the disturbance of his pleasures, should have made himself the avenger of a faith which he did not hold, was indeed odious and horrible. The thorough faith of Spain covers the flame of the wood pile with a sort of poetry ; we receive a lofty idea of human nobility at seeing a barbarous man, given up to all the impetuosity of his instincts, thus prefer faith to life, thus receive and give death for an abstract opinion. But on seeing in the country of indifference, in full civilisation, noble women burned, children tortured, tongues cut out, thirty unfortunates languishing and *soaking* in the bottom of the ditches of the Châtelet whilst awaiting their execution, and the King, to show his zeal, declaring that he was not content with his Court of the Parliament of Paris, and reprimanding his councillors as careless and tardy because they did not burn enough in a hurry, our only feeling is that of indignation, and we are surprised into doubting the moral worth of a country which has been able to suffer and provoke this execrable game of life.

Let us not, then, be astonished if Calvin appears to us so severe, so harsh in his convictions, so intolerant towards those of others. How to believe but half of that for which one is outlawed? The joy of suffering for faith is so great, that we have seen more than once, passionate natures embrace opinions for the sake of the pleasure of being sacrificed for them. Persecution is in this sense an essential condition for all religious creations. It has a marvellous efficacy in fixing ideas, in driving away doubts, and we may be allowed to believe that what we call (wrongly according to me) the scepticism of our time will give way before this energetic remedy. We are timid, undecided ; we scarcely believe in our own ideas. Perhaps, if it were given us to be persecuted for them, we should finish by believing them.

We do not desire it, for then we should become intolerant and persecutors in our turn.

And that rigour of character which constituted the strength of Calvin might be prejudicial to the development of knowledge and exclude the flexibility of the free spirit, carried away in all its senses by the disinterested love of the beautiful and the true, that is incontestable. But the force of action is only this price; breadth of mind knows nothing to establish; these are the narrow thoughts which reunite men. Founders in general show themselves to us like minds neither extensive nor amiable. We are surprised at first, in going through the letters of Calvin, to find in them rather the correspondence of a statesman and an administrator encumbered with business and details, than that of a thinker or of an ascetic. His theology, even, is but little transcendental, free enough from the scholastic, more lawyer than theologian. In working his reform, he does not regard speculative considerations so much as his views of practical morality. His long professions of faith hardly furnish any lines which the thought of our time can assimilate with advantage; the symbol has lost all its greatness; the philosophy of it is feeble; all imagination, all the poetry has disappeared. But it would be unjust to stop there. What does it matter if Calvin had been a philosopher and mediocre theologian, if that mediocrity even was the condition of the work which he ought to accomplish? A solitary thinker without passion, would he have succeeded like him in lifting the weight of the Middle Ages, and in boldly forcing back ten ages of arrears in the history of Christianity? Calvinism, even without his strong aristocratic organisation, without the vigorous protection to which he subdued the individual conscience, would it have resisted victoriously attacks so furious, and preserved in France an imperishable leaven? Power is not ordinarily gained, except at the price of great



sacrifices demanded from liberty, and we may be allowed to believe that, freed from his sombre and austere character, the attempt of Calvin would have been, like so many others, only an abortive attempt to escape from the enormous pressure which Catholicism was able to bring to bear upon the human mind.

The excellent work of M. Bonnet will count among the most essential documents which the historian of the revolutions of the sixteenth century will be obliged to consult. In spite of his strong and avowed convictions, M. Bonnet recognises the stains which disfigure the life of the Reformer, and blames his intolerance, explaining it, as he ought, by the spirit of the times. Let us receive, then, as a good omen, the promise which the learned editor makes in his preface to give us a history of Calvin composed from original and authentic writings. Nothing less than the prospect of that great work would make us wait with patience for the realisation of another engagement that M. Bonnet has contracted with the public, I would say—a *Vie de Renée de France*. I regret, for my part, this adjournment, which will deprive us for a long time still of knowing so much as she deserves, one of the most enlightened women of her age, and one of the most noble souls of all time. I know the reasons which have induced M. Bonnet to give priority to the severe Reformer. Guided by the purest and most disinterested considerations, he wished before everything to turn to and prefer that which he regards as a duty to his taste and his success.

But even from the point of view of proselytism, he will permit me to dispute his resolution. The Duchess of Ferrara is an apostle more appropriate to our time than Calvin. The women spread their seductive powers even to theology; they have a fair right to have an opinion on these matters, and the passion they bring to bear gives them more charm. Renée of France, passing the whole

day in reading treatises on the Mass and Predestination, artlessly seeking the truth from all that, and enduring the most heroic sufferings for her convictions, is the legend of Calvinism. The book where M. Bonnet will call to mind this beautiful spectacle, will be a ravishing book (I would not desire any other proof than the episode already published of Olympia Morata, and the interest which M. Bonnet has created for that learned and persecuted lady), whilst I dare not hope that, notwithstanding his talent and his love, he will succeed in making an amiable person of Calvin.

## CHANNING AND THE UNITARIAN MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES.

It is the destiny of Protestantism to share the common law of human things; I would say, to live and develop without attaining a fixed point and a permanent state. It is its privilege, and, if we will, its curse. If we believe that there is here below a complete system given at one time for all revealed truths, it is clear that Bossuet was right in his proud *Histoire des Variations* when he asserts that perpetual mobility is the genuine sign of error. But if we think to the contrary, that any religious or philosophical system which does not pretend to an exclusive and absolute meaning, we must certainly prefer that which possesses in itself resources of flexibility capable of accommodating itself to the movement of humanity, and modifying itself with her, and pursuing ever new consequences to an unknown result.

This tendency of Protestantism towards a religious ideal more and more purified, is shown just now under two sufficiently distinct aspects, according to the several genius of the two great parties of the Reformation. Germany on the one side, applying to theology her depth of mind, high imagination, and marvellous aptitude for critical research, attained at the end of the last century and at the beginning of this, one of the grandest and most poetic forms which it is given us to conceive. It was only for a moment, but what a moment in the history of the human mind was that, when Kant, Fichte, and Herder were Christians; when Klopstock drew the ideal of the modern Christ; when that



marvellous edifice of Biblical exegesis was raised, the masterpiece of acute criticism and lofty rationalism! Never under the name of Christianity will they look upon so many and such great things; but vagueness and indeterminateness, the essential conditions of poetry in religion, condemned that beautiful apparition to last only for a day and leave nothing for the future. The schism of the several elements, which were reconciled for a moment in his bosom, was not slow in manifesting itself. Pure religious sentiment joined to a narrow pietism, rationalism and criticism to the negative and sharp formula sufficiently analogous to those of our eighteenth century; Catholicism, which watches incessantly in order to profit by every sign of giving way, invades the ground in all parts

The English race, on their side, in Europe and in America adhere to the solution of the great problem put by the Reformation, and follow after their manner the formula of a Christianity which the modern mind is able to accept. They do not bring to this work either the strength of intellectual faculties or high poetry or freedom of criticism, or vast or penetrative knowledge, such as Germany alone in our time has brought to bear upon religious matters. A great uprightness of mind, an admirable simplicity of heart, an exquisite sentiment of morality, such were the gifts with which this serious and strong race sought Christ. Unitarianism, a sort of compromise sufficiently analogous to that which the Deacon Arius tried in the fourth century, was the highest result of this theology: of excellent practical application, a truly evangelical spirit, in the most lofty sense which we are accustomed to give that word, made up for that which his work was wanting in poetry and depth. We can say without hesitation, that from this direction have gone the most excellent lessons of morality and social philosophy which the world has known until

now. Served by good and solid natures, strangers on the one side, to the refinements and caprices of the artist, and on the other, to the requirements and scruples of the learned, the honest and wise school, of whom we speak, has proved once more how different are the gifts of the mind, and what an abyss separates the views of genius from the practical wisdom which organises in an efficient manner the amelioration of human kind.

Channing, whose name, somewhat new amongst us, gathers round him already so much sympathy and early admiration, has been without contradiction the most complete representative of this attempt—entirely American—at religion without mystery, at rationalism without criticism, at intellectual culture without lofty poetry, which seems to be the ideal to which the religion of the United States aspires. If he is not the founder, Channing is truly the saint of the Unitarians. The reports which reach us from America, show us that the opinion of his sanctity is growing daily, and almost bordering upon the legend. A sudden charm has attracted a certain number of souls among the elect in France and England towards his writings. We cannot, then, but approve of the thought which has induced a publicist, and one of the most distinguished among the learned, M. Laboulaye, to attach his name to the introduction amongst us of these excellent writings. The remarkable studies of M. Laboulaye, published in the *Journal des Débats*, had already called attention to the name of Channing in France, and inspired enlightened minds with a desire to know more about the master whose fame has filled all America. The volume of translation which we announce<sup>1</sup> answers to this desire; it includes the most excellent part of the works of Channing,

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres Sociales de W. E. Channing*, translated from the English, preceded by an essay upon the life and the doctrines of Channing, and an introduction by M. E. Laboulaye, member of the Institute.

his social works. At the outset of a religious apparition truly suitable to our time, and which seems assured of a great future, it is well to study, with the sympathy they deserve, but without decided predilection, the good and beautiful things, the physiognomy, of that illustrious reformer, and to investigate the part that his ideas can be called upon to take amongst us.

## I.

William Ellery Channing<sup>1</sup> was born at Newport, in the State of Rhode Island, the 7th of April 1780, from an honest family in good circumstances. We cannot say that his education was very distinguished, nor the circle in which he was brought up very suitable, for the development of a mind of great speculative capacity. Newport was a town of business and pleasure, and the very details into which his biographer artlessly enters, in order to raise up the society that we find there, give us a sufficiently poor idea of it. "Rich merchants," says he, "retired captains of the mercantile marine, and other persons attracted from motives of health, formed there a society refined, and even dissipated. The presence of English and French officers during the War of Independence furnished the polish of manners. We must even add, that from the effect of French liberalism and the license of speech so common amongst seafaring men, impiety was sufficiently spread among the greater part of the classes. . . ." We have a difficulty in understanding how, in the midst of merchants and retired officers, far from the great centres of instruction, one of those powerful and lofty individualities to which we give the name of genius, could have been formed. From thence, indeed, we feel that which will

<sup>1</sup> The biographical details which follow are taken from the *Memoirs of Channing* (New York) a collection full of interest, and which has penetrated to the very bottom of the soul of Channing.



one day be wanting in Channing. I would say, that refinement of mind which results from contact with an intellectual aristocracy, and which, perhaps, the popular medium better than citizen society knows how to develop. With a man specially devoted to works of the mind, this would certainly be an irreparable gap; but with a man destined, like Channing, for an entirely practical apostolate, it was perhaps a piece of good fortune. We must admit that the qualities of delicacy and flexibility, which are acquired by a varied cultivation of the intellectual faculties, would only injure the sway of the apostle. From the effect of seeing the different sides of things we become undecided. The good no longer inspires us with passion, for we see it counterbalanced by a dose almost equivalent to evil. Evil always disgusts us, but it does not irritate more than it should, for we are accustomed to regard it as necessary, and sometimes even as a condition of good. The apostle ought not to know all these shades. The honest Channing perhaps owed to his sober education the advantage of preserving throughout his life the energy of his moral tendencies and the absolute bent of his convictions. He had the happy privilege of good minds to go by the side of the abyss without being affected with giddiness, and to see the world under an angle sufficiently reduced, so as never to have been frightened by its immensity. He has not gone beyond the Scotch school in speculation, but he has brought their wise moderation into his theology. He has not known Germany well, and has only half understood her. His literary ideas and his scientific knowledge were those of a man instructed and cultivated, but without a special gift of penetration and originality.

On the contrary, upon all questions of social, moral, and political order he thought very happily, and with much force. The idea of communism, the first, and consequently

the most false, which presents itself to the mind when we commence to reflect upon the reform of human society, crossed his mind for a moment; he even had the temptation to join himself, as a minister, to a society of emigrants whose principle was a community of property. His infancy and his youth were troubled by great inquietudes, which contrast strangely with the profound calmness of the rest of his life. Forty years after that period of trial, he reverted to the idea with gentleness, and spoke of it in these terms:—"I lived alone, devoting my nights to the construction of plans and projects, and having no one under my roof except during the hours when I gave lessons; there I worked as I have never done since. Not having a human being to whom I could communicate my thoughts, and avoiding ordinary society, I passed through intellectual and moral struggles, through troubles of heart and mind sufficiently lively, and sufficiently absorbing, to take away sleep and to alter my constitution sensibly. I was reduced almost to a skeleton state. However, it is with happiness that I recall those days of isolation and sadness. If ever I have aspired with my whole soul towards purity and truth, it was then. In the midst of hard struggles I put to my inner self this great question, Shall I obey the highest or the lowest principles of my nature? Shall I be the victim of worldly passions, or the child and servant of God? I remember that this great conflict took place in me without any of the persons who were about me suspecting how I had been tried."

His reflections on religion brought about, at a fortunate moment, a profound discontent with the established Church, and a strong antipathy against the absolute and terrible dogmas of Calvinism. His ill-humour against *that vulgar and frightful theology*—so he called it—shows forth in every page of his writings. All his theology is summed up in one word—God is good. The severe manner of

regarding religion, which they looked upon as favourable to piety, seemed to him a cruel rigorousness, which spread a gloomy obscurity over God, over the present life, over the future life, and fatally led through sadness to the superstitions of Paganism. "English theology," he wrote towards 1801, "seems to me, in short, of very little value. An established Church appears to me to be the tomb of intelligence. To impose a fixed, invariable creed is to raise around the soul the walls of a prison. . . . The timidity, the coldness, and the dulness which generally distinguish all books of theology ought to be principally attributed to the cause of which we speak."

And some years afterwards: "I know that Calvinism has been embraced by many excellent men; but I know also that on some hearts it has the most saddening effect; that it spreads over them impenetrable darkness, and gives birth to a spirit of slavery and fear, which chills the best affections, which checks the most virtuous efforts, and sometimes overwhelms the reason. Upon impressionable minds the influence of this system is always to be dreaded. If they believe it, they will find in it motives for discouragement which extend to madness. If I and all my well-beloved friends and all my race have come from the hands of the Creator totally depraved, irresistibly drawn towards evil and hating good; if one part only of human kind can be saved from this miserable state, and the rest are to be condemned, by the Being who gave us a perverse and depraved nature, to endless torments and eternal flames, then I think that it only remains to lament in anguish of heart; existence is a curse, and I dare not say what is the Creator. Oh, merciful Father! I cannot in speaking of thee make use of the terms which this system suggests. No; thou hast given me too many proofs of thy goodness for such a reproach to be found in my lips. Thou hast created me to be happy; thou hast called me to virtue and piety,



because that in virtue and piety consists happiness, and thou expectest from me that which thou hast rendered me capable of accomplishing."

The religious state to which Channing thus found himself brought was a doctrine sufficiently analogous to that of the Arians and the Pelagians. He did not regard man as entirely corrupted by sin, and did not see in Christ the incarnate God descended upon the earth to bear the burthen of our faults, and to obtain by his own sufferings our justification; but he did not regard man more than being in a normal state and naturally advancing towards good. He did not only see in Jesus Christ a person of superior religious genius, who, by the effect of a delicate temperament and under the stimulant of the enthusiasm of his nation, had attained the most perfect union with God. He joined himself rather with those who considered human kind as actually degenerated by an abuse of free-will. In Jesus Christ he recognised a sublime being, who had worked a crisis in the condition of humanity, renewed the moral sense, and touched with a salutary efficacy the sources of good hidden at the bottom of the heart of man.

These doctrines have much analogy with those of Unitarianism, which in America already counts some churches. Channing rallied to the Unitarians, and at the age of twenty-three years he accepted the duty of pastor, which he fulfilled for the remainder of his life in the church of Federal Street at Boston; but he never carried there a spirit of sect or party. His aversion to all official establishment in religion made him fear that even the largest sect was still too narrow. There is hardly one of his sermons in which he does not come back to this fundamental thought. "I pray you to remember," he says, "that in this discourse I speak in my own name. I do not give you the opinions of any sect; I give you mine. I alone am responsible for what I say; let no one listen to me

to know what others think. I belong, it is true, to that society of Christians who believe that there is only one God the Father, and that Jesus Christ is not this only God ; but my adhesion to that sect is very far from being complete, and I do not seek to attract new proselytes. That which other men believe is of no consequence to me. I listen to their arguments with gratitude ; I am free to accept or reject their conclusions. I take, it is true, with pleasure the name of Unitarian because they try to decry it, and I have not learned the religion of Christ to fall back before the reproaches of men. If this name were more honoured than it is, I should perhaps be glad to reject it ; for I fear the chains which a party imposes. I wish to belong not to a sect, but to the community of free spirits who love the truth, and who follow Christ upon this earth and in heaven. I desire to escape from the narrow surroundings of a particular Church, to live under the open heaven, in full daylight, looking far and all around me, seeing with my own eyes, listening with my own ears, and following the truth humbly but resolutely, however arduous or solitary the way may be to which she conducts me. I am not, then, the organ of a sect ; I speak for myself alone, and I thank God for living in a time and under circumstances which make it a duty in me to open my soul in its entirety with freedom and simplicity."

The true originality of Channing is in this idea of a pure Christianity, free from all ties of sect ; in his aversion to all spiritual despotism, even when freely accepted ; in his hatred against everything which he calls a *degrading uniformity of opinions*. Nobody has found stronger words to condemn official faith, and faith by command ; nobody has better understood that a truth which man has not drawn from his own heart, and which he applies as a sort of topical exterior, is inefficacious and without moral value. The word to believe is antipathetical to Channing. He

saw in the obedience required for the faiths a remainder of the old system which rests upon the fear and upon the oppression of individual consciences by constituted authority. He believed that he would rather rouse some bad passions than perpetuate slavery and lethargy. Such unity as the Church has contrived since its origin appeared to him quite impossible to pursue. Unity in variety, such was for him the law of the future Church, and he cradled it with this beautiful dream, that the catholicity imposed by a clergy distinct from the faithful, and keeping for him the monopoly of religious things, would be replaced in the future by an universal communion of Christians animated by pure love.

This liberal and lofty toleration is the side which pleases most in Channing, and which made him find the most noble accents; let us not delay in citing it: "Your chief duty in the place of belief," said he, "may be summed up in two precepts: *Respect those who differ from you; respect yourselves.* Honour men of different sects. Do not figure as if you had the exclusive privilege of truth and goodness. Never consider the Church of Christ as enclosed within the limits of a human invention, but as comprising all sects. Honour all men; at the same time respect yourselves. Never suffer your opinions to be treated with contempt; but then do not impose them upon any one, let them see that you reverence them as the truth, and that you await the respect and courtesy of those who converse with you upon this point. Always place yourself upon an equal footing, face to face with each sect, and do not embolden any one by your timidity to take towards you a dictatorial tone or show superiority or contempt."

A singular result of this indefinite breadth, of this exclusion of all exclusiveness, was to render him particularly tolerant to the most intolerant of all religious societies. He saw around him Catholicism calumniated, half-perse-



cutted, and he loved it. The lively sympathy which he conceived for the writings of Fenélon, the influence of the beautiful recollections which Cheverus has left to the United States, and above all, the advantage which Catholicism had in his eyes of not being official in the country it dwelt in, determined his thoughts in this sense. He believed in the future of the Catholic propaganda in England, and in particular in the Oxford movement, because he saw in it a reaction of the individual conscience against the established Church. He was indignant against the theologians who were alarmed at the progress of Catholicism, and believed themselves to be as infallible as the Pope. "Do they not feel," said he, "that if men ought to choose between two infallibilities, they will choose the Pope as the more ancient, and the one which is supported by the greatest number of votes? This system cannot last so long nor spread so far without having some deep foundation in our nature. The ideas and the words of *Church* and *Antiquity* have a powerful charm. Men, in their weakness, their ignorance, and their idleness, love to shelter themselves where they find a vast organisation which time has sanctified. We become strong and proud when we are supported by the multitude, by a great name, and the authority of ages. It is not surprising that the Roman Church should revive at this moment when a sickly fear of innovation reacts against the spirit of reform and draws men towards the past. This Oxford movement has many chances of spreading because it seems to be less the work of policy and clerical ambition than of real fanaticism."

Such was Channing during forty years in his chair at Federal Street. Possessed with an exclusive idea of good, he saw but little of anything beyond this supreme end. He visited Europe, but he did not understand it, nor did he seek to understand it. His outward life was simple and mild. In France, where every exceptional vocation

consecrated to divine objects is put outside common right, and implies celibacy, it would be a strange sight that of an apostle, a saint, living the life of the world. The empire of vulgarity among us is so strong, that no young girl would have consented to marry Channing. No such incident crossed his calm and serene existence. The indefatigable optimism which was the whole of his religion he did not abandon for a moment. "The earth," said he, "becomes younger with its years; man is better as he grows old." In the last summer he passed here below, some one asked in his presence at what age they should place the happiest period of life. He smiled, and answered that it was about sixty years. He was then that age. He died shortly after, in October 1842, without pain or sadness, at sunset, the hour he had always loved, and which he kept as sacred. He confessed that, as he advanced in life, he had been more and more happy. "Life," he wrote, "appears to me a gift which acquires a greater value every day. I have not found it as a cup foaming and sparkling on the surface, becoming insipid in proportion as it was drained. In truth, I detest that superannuated simile. . . . Life is a blessing for us. If I could see others as happy as I am myself, what a world ours would be! But this world is good in spite of the obscurity which surrounds it. The longer I live, the more I see the light pierce through the clouds—I am sure that the sun is above."

## II.

It was without premeditation that Channing became a writer. His works do not bear witness to any literary ambition. There is not in them a single passage where the least pretension to art or style is to be remarked. Channing was an evangelical minister and preacher. His works are only his sermons, spiritual letters, or articles

inserted in a religious journal, *The Christian Examiner*. The idea of writing a book only came to him late, and happily he did not realise it. The plan of his book was neither new nor original. It would have been an essay, like so many others, on man and human nature, the perpetual theme of Anglo-Scotch philosophy. I am easily induced to believe that Channing's essay would not have been an exception to the dulness of these kinds of books, excellent without doubt for certain degrees of intellectual culture, but which teach nothing, and have but little value, since history and the general considerations on the development of the human species have almost made us forget that mean philosophy.

If Channing was not a writer, neither was he a savant or a philosopher. He wanted instruction; his historical knowledge was all second or third hand. He had not that delicate feeling of shades which is called criticism, without which there is no understanding the past, and consequently no extensive understanding of human things. It is astonishing to see at what point the English are in general left destitute of this gift of historic intuition so richly distributed in Germany, so largely possessed in France by some minds, when it does not operate from antiquity too far remote, nor from an intellectual state too different from ours. At the present day, antiquity teaches still at Oxford, as it taught with us in the time of Rollin; not so well perhaps. For certain parts of political history this mediocre power of penetration can produce works valuable and sufficiently true; but for literary, religious, or philosophical history, which is destined to become more and more, great history, and for throwing back into the shade that which was formerly called by that name, we must have quite another power of divination, and such is the importance which researches of this order have assumed in our days, that no one can be either thinker or philosopher



without having that quality. Happily one may be an honest man without anything of the kind. This is, above all, what Channing was; he was that to a degree which almost amounted to genius, and esteemed it at least a thousand times better than talent. Like all men born for the practice of virtue rather than speculation, he had few ideas, and those ideas very simple. He believed in revelation, in the supernatural, in miracles, in the prophets, and the Bible. He endeavoured to prove the divinity of Christianity by arguments which do not differ in any degree from those of the old school. This Puritan, who sold his faith so dear, was at bottom very credulous in all that pertains to history, for want of being broken in to the intellectual gymnastics which result from being long accustomed to deal with problems of the human mind.

At the same time that he lacked critical power, Channing was wanting also in great originality. When we compare that excellent soul, that saint of contemporary America, with those who, like him, in the past have been possessed with zeal for the glory of God or the good of their brethren, a sentiment of sadness and coldness seizes us. Instead of the splendid theology of ancient times, instead of the grand enthusiasm of Francis of Assisi, who speaks so powerfully to the imagination, we here find an honest gentleman, well placed and well clothed; enthusiastic and inspired in his manner, but without any marvellous halo; devoted, but without grandeur; noble and pure, but without poetry, if this is not an entirely domestic and private poetry. Far be these paradoxes of incomplete minds, which, because they do not include the beauty of the past, would reconstruct a vanished world with archeological regrets, as if the first condition of serious admiration was not to regard each thing in its natural medium, that is to say, in its epoch. The dazzling fancies of ancient religion would in our days be regarded as chimerical. We cannot mend a

dream by an act of will, and we cannot without injustice reproach modern men for not having qualities which the men of the artless epochs owed to their ignorance and their simplicity. It would not be less unjust to reproach Channing with the humility of his theology, since humility itself, in point of abstract speculation, is a condition for being reasonable. His theology at bottom was perhaps nothing but the theology of the nineteenth century and America—broad, simple, honest, practical—a theology, according to Franklin, with great metaphysical compass or transcendental scope. Those who appreciate a religion for its simplicity and its degree of transparency ought to be enchanted with this. It is certain that if the modern mind is right in wishing for a religion which, without excluding the supernatural, diminishes the dose as much as possible, the religion of Channing is the most perfect and purest that has yet appeared.

But is that all? In truth, when the symbol shall have been reduced to a belief in God and Christ, what shall we have gained? Will scepticism consider itself satisfied? Will the formula of the universe be more complete and more clear? the destiny of man and humanity less impenetrable? Does Channing, with his purified symbol, avoid better than the Catholic theologians the objections of the incredulous? Alas! no. He admits the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but he does not admit his divinity; he admits the Bible, but he does not admit hell. He displays all the susceptibilities of a scholiast in order to establish against the Trinitarians in what sense Christ is the Son of God, and in what sense he is not. But if we agree that he had a real and miraculous existence from one end to the other, why not frankly call him divine? The one does not require a greater effort of faith than the other. In truth, in this path it is not the first step which costs. We must not traffic with the supernatural; faith

goes altogether, and the sacrifice made, it is not fitting to reclaim in detail those rights which we have already ceded once for all.

That would be, in my idea, the narrow and contradictory side of Channing. What is he but a rationalist who admits miracles, prophecies, and a revelation? How does it serve him to say that revelation ought to be judged by reason, and that in cases of conflict, reason ought to be preferred? Every step in rationalism is arbitrary. The fact of that revelation which we supposed at first to be demonstrated, is elsewhere the essential point which ought to be established, and with the requirements of modern criticism we cannot say that this is an easy thing. We then find ourselves brought to a diversity of opinion, which we would remedy by a revelation. But if we suppose there is any absolute formula of truth, how can we hope to arrive at it by individual efforts? How push confidence in our own judgment to the point of infallibility, and believe that we have found the fixed point which no one up till now has met with?

I do not overlook what I said just now as to the objection to Channing, which is what Catholic theologians say to Protestantism in general. It is, indeed, the argument of Catholic controversialists; a very weak argument, or rather none at all, when it is addressed to liberal Protestantism, which is only spiritualism attaching itself to the grand tradition of Christ; it has always appeared to me without reply against that part of the Reformed Church which aspires to possess the apparent strictness of Catholicism without having its chains. But this inconsequence may be excusable, and often honourable. I am the first to recognise it; but it must be admitted that if Protestantism only aspires to replace one set of dogmatic creeds by another, there is no reason for its existence: Catholicism is then of more value than it. Channing never attained,



on this point, a perfectly clear formula in his own mind. If, on the one side, he preached the most entire liberty of symbol, he stopped on this side of pure criticism. If he arose with energy against the established Church, he never renounced the hope of finding the true form of evangelical doctrine. If he was ordained to seek by himself, he did not imagine that he could be carried by independent research outside Christianity. However, if we admit the reality of a revelation made at a certain moment of history, if we admit truths divinely manifested, and consequently being imposed on the conscience of those who believed them to have been revealed, what difficulty would there be in recognising an external establishment, a Church teaching with supernatural lights? A miracle which happened eighteen hundred years ago is neither more easy nor more difficult to admit than a miracle which happened in our time. The Catholic had some right to say to Channing, "You are not more free than I am, and you obey an authority much less clear: you obey the Bible: as for me, I obey the Church." I confess that, for my part, I accept more willingly the authority of the Church than that of the Bible. The Church is more human, more living. However immovable we may suppose her to be, she answers better to the needs of each epoch. It is, if I dare say so, more easy to make her understand reason than a book which has been closed for eighteen hundred years.

Channing never saw very clearly that the consequence, distant if you will, but inevitable, of the admission of a revelation is the admission of an authority to interpret it; in other terms, Catholicism. The political institution of religion, like the nations understood as emanating from Rome, went against him rightly. But from such a system, which borders fatally on idleness and indifference, are we right in concluding that the less unquiet religion of the people of the South (and France is becoming more and

more a country of the South) has not also its poetry? Because these people, instead of understanding religion as an endless pursuit, seek in it only repose; because that, avoiding trouble, they indulge at leisure in a religion ready prepared for them, is that a reason for excluding them from the kingdom of God? Who knows if, at the bottom, they are not wiser than those who seek after theological truth? If they do not discuss the problem, is it not because they feel vaguely and instinctively that it is insoluble? The Catholic, accepting the dogma such as the time has made it, and without searching into it, is in one sense nearer the great philosophy than the Protestant, who incessantly seeks to return to a pretended primitive formula of Christianity. If we could conveniently direct the same source of opinion in the Church, it would be, in the Catholic manner, to allow the dogma to form by the current of governing ideas, and by a sort of tacit understanding among the faithful, something more profound than in the appeal to an immutable revelation, where we are compelled to find a faith for all time.

It is quite plain that the soul, deeply penetrated with the sanctity of religious things, should cry out against that outward religion, remains of Roman Paganism, which does not command faith, but only respect. I shall always remember with commiseration the profound horror which I witnessed in an American missionary who was present at an official ceremony at the Madeleine. The profane preparation, the uniforms in the holy place, the places marked as in a theatre, all that preoccupation which assuredly was not of God, that crowd where no one thought of praying, all that created in him the impression of a hideous Paganism. This is certainly a praiseworthy feeling, and I hasten to say that my sympathies go with seriousness and delicacy of conscience. But we cannot deny, on the other side, that Paganism has very deep roots among certain

races, and requires that each should perform his part in a certain degree. If an abstract religion, purely monotheistic, was the best for all men, no religion could be compared to Islamism. By its various mysteries and, above all, by the worship of the saints and the Virgin, Catholicism responds to the need for outward demonstrations and plastic art which is so strong in the South of Europe. Otherwise it is of the nature of an official religion to command less imperiously the belief, precisely because she is only placed as an institution to which we can conform by agreeing to an absolute faith, just as, in order to obey the laws of a State, it is not necessary to believe they are the best in the world. From thence it comes that in rigorously Protestant countries, where religion is taken quite seriously, they are almost always as intolerant, at least to the freethinker, as Catholic countries; from thence comes also the singular phenomenon that the Catholic countries are, above all, those which have known incredulity. Is there a country which has been less constrained by its religion than Italy during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance before the Reformation? The philosophy of the eighteenth century could only have been born in a Catholic country;<sup>1</sup> these two things are of the same order, and possess a crowd of secret analogies which it would be too long to enumerate here.

The impartial critic, in understanding and approving the scruples of the American school, is not then compelled to share them in an absolute manner. He knows that everything here below is either good or evil; he sees, on

<sup>1</sup> The opinion that the philosophy of the eighteenth century came from the Reformation is erroneous. If this philosophy has any antecedents, it is in the Pagan Italy of 1500 we must seek for them. But the Reformation is precisely a reaction against the Italian unbelief of that time. Is it necessary to add that sometimes, in a general sense, the Reformation claims a brilliant part in the work of enfranchising the human mind, and that every true liberal finds there, a branch of his ancestors?



one side, religious indifference as a consequence of the official system, on the other, individual aberrations like the sequel of theological mania. Doubtless, if there was an absolute truth which was the reward of efforts made to attain it, he would preach research and examination to all; but can we, in good faith, hope that he will be more fortunate than so many others, and that he alone will enjoy the privilege of finding again the true symbol of the religion of Christ? Up to what point, then, is it advantageous that a country should thus have a strong desire for theological research? Northern Germany, as I know, thanks to its entire religious liberty and its marvellous aptitude for everything belonging to the domain of thought, has perhaps realised the finest page of the history of the human soul. But do we see that England and the United States, where each person makes theology a personal affair, possess an intellectual culture superior to that of France, where no one cares for theology? The habitual reading of the Bible, a necessary consequence of the Protestant system, is it then in itself such a great good? and the Catholic Church, is it so guilty for having put a seal upon that book, and for having taken no notice of it? Certainly not; and I am tempted to say that the most magnificent *coup d'état* of that grand institution was to have substituted herself, living and efficacious, for a dumb authority. Hebrew literature is doubtless an admirable literature, but only for the savant and the critic, who can study it in the original, and restore the true meaning to each of the curious passages which compose it. As to those who admire it on trust, they admire more often that which is not in it; the truly original character of the book of the Old and New Testament escapes them. What is to be said of those illiterate persons who plunge themselves wholly into it without being prepared in a sufficiently obscure antiquity? We may imagine the ruin of mind

which the habitual reading of a book like the Apocalypse, or even like the Book of Kings, must cause to simple and uninstructed people. We know the strange aberrations which, at the epoch of the English Revolution, arose from this unhealthy meditation. In America the source of these same extravagances is not yet stopped. Doubtless it would be better to see people read the Bible than to read nothing, as they do in Catholic countries; but we confess also that the book might be better chosen. It is a sad sight that of an intelligent nation spending their leisure time upon a monument of another age, and seeking all the day for symbols in a book where there are none.

The efforts of Channing to escape from this pressure of the Bible brought him occasionally into singular struggles against the received texts. Hell, such as orthodoxy has understood it, clashed with his gentleness. For him hell is only in the conscience; in the same way heaven has nothing local, and is nothing but a union with God and with all good and great beings. I wish it well; but what simplicity to count how many times hell is mentioned in the Bible, and to mention with satisfaction that it is only five or six times, and that even a good translation might find the means of getting rid of that disagreeable word! That which is revealed is altogether where it is not, and if there is a word come from God, it does not belong to man to mitigate it according to the progress of his reason. In history there are the same impediments. Channing is brought to make for himself a primitive Christianity, entirely ideal, to which it would only be a question of returning. "Religion," says he, "which was given to elevate man, we have used it to make him abject. Religion, which was given to create in us a generous hope, we have made it an instrument of servile intimidation and torture. Religion, revealed from God to enrich the human soul, has been employed to enclose it in the narrow com-

pass of a sect, to found the Inquisition, and to light the wood piles of the martyrs. Religion, given to make thought and conscience free, has served, by a criminal perversion, to break the one and the other, in order to make them submit to priests, to symbols purely human." This Protestant theory of a golden age of Christianity, followed by an iron age, when primitive thought would be obscured, is not very acceptable. Christianity has never been either so perfect as the Protestants suppose at the beginning, nor so degraded as they would make it at its decline. There was never any time of his long career which could be taken as the ideal; so there was not any when he had precisely failed in his mission. A critical history of the origins of Christianity will show the singular illusions which prevail as to this primitive age, as yet so little known, because we have scarcely studied it except in a partisan spirit, and with the intention of seeking for arguments for or against the dogmas, of which the germ was hardly then existent.

In general, Channing wants that which America still wants—high intellectual culture and critical science. He is not entirely *au courant* with the affairs of the human mind; he does not know as to the general result. All that we know of his own times as a religion of the soul his religion is not worth that of North Germany: as a great institution, it is not worth as much as Catholicism. It asks too much sacrifice from the critic, and it does not ask enough from those who prove the need of a belief. The tendency of modern times seems to call for a religion of that kind, formed from the common residue of all the worships, after the elimination of the dogmatic particulars peculiar to each of them, and of numerous facts brought in to induce a belief. The whole of Asia, for two or three ages, seems to have arrived by the simplification of her old symbols at deism. Rammohun Roy, the most illustrious



representative of the Brahminical race in our time, died a Unitarian after the manner of Channing. Voltaire, translated into Guzerathi, serves at the present day in the controversy of the later disciples of Zoroaster, now become pure deists, against the Protestant missionaries. Under the revolutionary movements in China there is evidently concealed an appeal to monotheism against the degradation with which the old worship of the Celestial Empire seems to have been struck. Is that a sign which ought to show us in deism, the final term of the evolutions of humanity? That would be so if the human mind, by the side of reason, did not include many instincts more capricious. Religion is not only philosophy; it is art: we must not then ask it to be too reasonable. That grain of fancy, which we know not how to get rid of, will upset combinations in appearance the most reasonable. The need to believe something extraordinary, is innate in man; a religion too simple will never content him. The next day after the most severe exclusions, the oddities, the particular creeds, the mean practices will resume their rights. Faith wishes the impossible; she is only satisfied at that price. To-day the Hindoos still every year walk over burning coals in order to attest the virginity of Draupadi, the common wife the five sons of Kouron.

### III.

The true mission of Channing was evidently all moral. His theology, like all attempts which aspire to resolve an insoluble problem, is very easily attacked. As to his morality, we can praise it without reserve; it is in that, he is to us original and new. Nothing, indeed, in our European organisation can give us an idea of such an apostolate. In our eyes, the ardour for proselytism which makes the apostle or the missionary, does not go without

a positive and complicated religion, charged with dogmas and practices. Here we have a Vincent de Paul less his devotion, a Cheverus without the priest. We must read the biography which Channing himself has given us of the reverend Tuckerman, his master, and his guide in that path of charity, in order to fancy the new form of lay holiness such as the United States appear destined to reveal to the world. The eminently English nature of Channing, his gentlemanly delicacy, his optimism also, which made the sight of evil a true punishment for him, rendered his ministry of charity much more meritorious. "My spirit seeks the good, the perfect, and the beautiful," he wrote. "I cannot without a sort of torture, place vividly before my imagination that which man suffers from his own crimes and from the cruelty of his brethren. All the perfection of art spread over these horrible and purely tragic subjects does not reconcile me to them. It is only from a feeling of duty that I read in the newspapers the reports of crime and misfortune. You see that there is little stuff in me for a reformer."

I truly know nothing in our days which recalls those beautiful and great moral sermons and that lofty manner of treating social questions. The problems which among us have troubled the human mind, the solution of which we have not caught a glimpse of yet, are all solved with Channing by charity, by esteem of man, by the belief that human nature is good, and that in developing itself it becomes better. No one ever believed more firmly in progress, in the beneficial influence of light and civilisation on all classes. Channing was a democrat in that he did not admit any other nobility than that of virtue and labour, that he only saw salvation for humanity in the intellectual cultivation of the popular masses and in their introduction into the bosom of the great civilised family. "I am a leveller," he wrote in 1831, "but I wish to accomplish my mission

by raising those who are in the lowest rank, in drawing the working-man from the indigence which degrades him and from the ignorance which brutalises him. If I understand what Christianity and philanthropy mean, there is no precept clearer than that."

In politics Channing was but little refined. He was liberal, and, what was rare enough, liberal from a religious motive. The revolution of 1830 caused him a quick joy. He heard the news of it at Newport, and went back again immediately to Boston in order to exchange his congratulations with friends of constitutional liberty, and to communicate from the height of his pulpit the hopes of which his heart was full. He was much astonished to find that there was little echo to his enthusiasm, and he cursed most energetically the numbness of opinion caused by self-interest. The coldness of the youth above all surprised and pained him. Recollecting the processions and the rejoicings of his youth, he did not understand that the free men of America viewed with indifference the reappearance of Lafayette, the calm firmness of the people, and the future of liberty which seemed to be opening for Europe. One evening about that time he met a person of his acquaintance. "Ah! well, sir," said he with a tone of sarcasm which was not habitual to him, "are you too old, too wise, like the young people of the college, to have any enthusiasm to bear witness in favour of the heroes of the Polytechnic School?" "Sir," replied his interlocutor, "you seem to me to be the only young man I know." "Always young for liberty," replied Channing with a vibrating voice and warmly shaking the hand of his friend.

These are noble sentiments for which we need never blush. However, are these political and social ideas of Channing, so simple, so excellent, and so pure, anything more than his religious ideas under the shelter of criticism? A people who should realise the ideal of Channing, would



they be truly a people complete according to the model we conceive of a high civilisation? We doubt it. They would be an honest people, set in order, composed of good and happy individuals: they would not be a great people. Human society is more complex than Channing supposed it to be. In the face of calamities like those of the Middle Ages, we may be allowed to believe that the essential would be to render life as little unhappy as possible: in the face of a moral relaxation such as we are now witnessing, we willingly believe that the work of social reform would consist in giving to the world a little honesty; but these are exclusive views, conceived under the empire of momentary necessity. Man is not here below only for the purpose of being happy; he is not here even for the purpose of being simply honest: he is here for the purpose of realising great things by society, to attain nobility (to holiness, as Christianity says), and to rise above vulgarity where it creeps over the existence of almost every individual. The least inconvenience of Channing's world, that one would die of weariness in it; genius would be useless there, high art impossible. The Scotch Puritan of the seventeenth century represents very nearly the dream of the Unitarians, a species of ideal after the manner of Israel, where every one knew the Bible, argued on his faith, discussed public affairs, where drunkenness was unknown, and where one never heard a single oath. But with what precious gift has Scotland of the seventeenth century enriched the world? Would not God have been better worshipped if, at the risk of some discordant words, more great and beautiful things had been produced? Italy, on the contrary, is certainly the country where the ideal of Channing has been less realised: from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, Pagan without morality, given up to all the transports of passion and genius; since, beaten down, superstitious, without resources; at present, gloomy, irritable,

deprived of wisdom. However, we must see Italy ruin herself with the past, or America with the future, then which will leave the greatest void in the heart of humanity? What is the whole of America beside a ray of that infinite glory with which a city of the second or third order—Florence, Pisa, Siena, Perugia—shines in Italy? Before taking in the scale of human greatness a rank comparable to those cities, New York and Boston have much to do; and I doubt whether, by vegetarian societies or by the propagation of pure Unitarian doctrine, they will attain an approach to it.

Rightly convinced that the perfection of human society consists entirely in the amelioration of the individual, Channing applied himself with earnestness to details, which do honour to the delicacy of his conscience, but which from their minuteness almost make us smile. He has rightly seen that intemperance is the principal cause of the misery and coarseness of the lower classes, from which he concludes that to cure intemperance would be to attack the social evil at its root. A great part of his life and his activity was indeed consecrated to that assuredly praiseworthy work. But in truth, a people who will drink only water, will they be greater? Will they realise a more beautiful page of human history? Will they find a higher ideal of art or of thought? That manner of attaching a social importance to one thing, which we can regard as relevant to individual morality, only shows well the abyss which separates American thought from ours; and how difficult it is, while following such different views, for the New and the Old World ever to meet in the same policy and the same faith.

Of the two manners of imagining human progress, one, as it were, resulting from the gradual elevation of the whole of humanity, and consequently of the lower classes, towards a middle state, the other, as it were, realised by

an aristocracy, supposing a vast lowering underneath it, Channing adheres very decidedly to the first. Woe to him who would not do as he did, and forsake for obsolete predilections the cause, henceforth indisputable, of modern democracy! But this accepted position ought not to close our eyes to the dangers of the path where the democratic nations tread, nor render us unjust towards the entirely different manner in which the past has understood civilisation. If we could once for all resign ourselves to sacrifice some, in view of the necessities of the common work; if we admit, as antiquity did, that society is essentially composed of some thousands of individuals living a complete life, others only existing in order to procure it for that small number, the problem will be infinitely simplified and susceptible of a much higher solution. We shall not have to take into account a number of humiliating details which democracy is obliged to consider. The rise of a civilisation is ordinarily in inverse proportion to the number of those who share in it; intellectual culture ceases to mount up when it aspires to enlarge itself; the mass, on being introduced into cultivated society, almost always lowers the level. These are the reflections we are permitted to make without incurring the reproach of denying the most irresistible tendencies of the present day. Let us add even, that the particular character of France (character which we do not intend here to praise or depreciate) does not permit us to suppose that the ideas of Channing would be applicable there, even with many restrictions.

These ideas, indeed, suppose, or at least aspire to, the creation of an enlightened population rather than a grand culture. But with an affinity towards intelligence, France is essentially an aristocratic country. The moral temperament of France reunites the extremes: a general vulgarity underneath mediocrity, and by the side of that



vulgarity an intellectual aristocracy to which no other could perhaps be compared. We do not find in any past so much wit, and at the same time so little taste for liberal things. Education, such as Channing understands it, would amongst us be too strong for the one and too weak for the others. In religion the ideas of Channing (this is not a reproach I intend) do not seem to me more appropriate to our country. France is nearly denuded of religious initiative. If France had been capable of creating a religious movement that was suitable for her, she would have become Protestant. Circumstances were never as favourable as they were in the sixteenth century; never was more heroism displayed. Ah! well, France, it must be said with regret, has rejected Protestantism as antipathetic to her nature. France is the most orthodox country in the world, for she is the most indifferent to religion. To innovate in theology is to believe in theology. But France has too much mind ever to be a theological country. Heresy has nothing to do there: the only great heresiarch she ever produced, Calvin, only found fortune beyond her frontiers. It is well to fear that the wretched miscarriage of all the attempts which have been made more recently to modify the forms and spirit of Catholicism amongst us, may only be an indication of the fate reserved for attempts of the same kind in the future.

In religion, as in all things, France wishes the universal, and cares but little for the delicate and the distinguished. She does not love small sects, the *aparts*—those religions of chapels and coteries which the English race love so much, precisely on account of their profound piety. Every religious controversy is in France looked upon as bad taste: they do not understand how people can be divided on such a small thing. The argument that the theologians use against the Protestants of the perpetual divisions and new sects, which they never cease producing (as though it

were not in reality a sign of religious life and activity, and as though uniformity of belief was not always caused by humbling the mind), this argument, I say, is found in France entirely decisive. See why, after each effort made to shake off her indifference, France falls back again more heavily than ever into Catholicism or unbelief. This country is absolute in all things: she must have theses cut out for her which afford her occasion to use her rhetoric and satisfy her taste for general declamation. The wise men see and wish for something better; but the wise men are not the country. The philosophy of the eighteenth century, which is something eminently French, is in a sense profoundly Catholic, by its universal tendency, its want of criticism, its carelessness of shades, and its pretence of substituting for theological infallibility another infallibility.

We may hope, then, as it seems to us, that the ideas of Channing may be destined to reconcile among us a fairly numerous family of adherents. He understands it himself. His letters to MM. De Sismondi and De Gerando betray a constant prepossession for France, and, in the midst of feelings of a lively sympathy, allow a little hope to break through. "I desire," he wrote to the latter, "to put a question to you, which I wish you to answer, I hope, with entire frankness. Are the religious views developed in my volume in any way applicable to the needs and to the state of France? I am not sorry to read in your letter that the English sects have not succeeded in spreading among you. They can only give a poor form of religion. For some time England has made but little progress in the higher truths. Her missionaries, if you listen to them, would throw France backward three centuries. I believe that Religion, when she shall reappear among you, will show herself under a more divine form. I believe that France, after so many efforts towards progress, will not take again to the worm-eaten theology of the ages of



antiquity." "I do not hope, nor do I desire," he wrote to M. De Sismondi, "that Christianity should revive in France under her ancient forms. Something better is necessary. . . . One of the greatest means for restoring Christianity is to break the almost universal habit in France of identifying it with Catholicism or the old Protestantism. Another means is to show how much it is in harmony with the spirit of freedom, philanthropy, and of progress, and make people see that these principles require the assistance of Christianity for their entire development. The identity of that religion with the most extensive benevolence has particularly need of being understood. At least, if Christianity should not fulfil all these conditions, I could not wish it success." "From whence shall salvation come to us?" he says again; "that is the question which constantly rises in my mind. Will the world receive the impulse from individual reformers or from new institutions? Will the work accomplish itself by a silent action being exercised in the bosom of the masses? or will many great convulsions, overturning the actual state of things, be necessary, like the fall of the Roman Empire, in order to introduce a reform worthy of the name? Sometimes I fear that this last means will only carry it away, so deep does the corruption of the Church and of society appear to me."

These doubts upon the religious future of the old world were for him never dissipated. He understood that his Christianity, liberal and without tradition, was good for a young world, where, if I dare say so, another plan of humanity was founded, but would be inapplicable to those old civilisations where every one was an antiquary according to his fancy. He remained faithful to America. There indeed his ideas seem to us to have an immense future. The United States are perhaps destined to realise for the first time in the eyes of the world an enlightened religion,



purely individual, making honest men, and altogether exempt from metaphysical pretensions. The name of Channing will be applied to that foundation, not as that of chief of a sect (he would have been the first to refuse that honour), but as that of one of the men in whom the new spirit first attained a complete and attractive expression.

If the problem of the world was to be solved by uprightness of heart, simplicity, and moderation of spirit, Channing would have resolved it. But other qualities are needful for that, and Channing, who received them perhaps from Nature as much as Nature gives them, did not find himself in the intellectual medium which develops them and makes them fructify. Let us say, once for all, that nothing is worth honesty, goodness, true piety, those essential gifts of beautiful souls. "When God formed the heart of man, he first of all put goodness there as the proper character of the divine nature, and in order to be as a mark of that beneficent hand from which we came."<sup>1</sup> Goodness, however, does not suffice to solve the problem of things. Her part is fine enough: to console this life, but not to reveal the secret. For this, science and genius are as necessary as elevation of heart and purity of soul. A world without science and without genius is as incomplete as a world without goodness. Channing hardly understood that second condition, and that time again he sinned for having seen the things as much more simple than they are in reality.

It does not please God that I should discourage the noble minds who are justly struck with the imperfection of our religious state in desiring reform and calling their wishes a worship better adapted to their needs. When their efforts are only confined to the amelioration and consolation of some elect souls, would they not be sufficiently rewarded? But I dare not hope for them an extended

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet.

and truly social action. It does not appear that henceforth there is a place for new and original speculations in the field of theology, nor that the religious state of humanity is susceptible of change in a notable manner. Buddhism, it is true, seems destined to disappear, and Islamism will only be eternal in the Arab race; but it is difficult to believe that the equilibrium of the three great branches of Christianity (Latin or Catholic Church, Greek or Orthodox Church, and Protestantism) ought henceforth to be troubled in a notable manner. Will the relations, at least, of philosophy and Christianity change? Will the one of these two forms of human thought succeed in absorbing the other, or will a durable peace reunite their contrary pretensions? Besides, we do not think it. Philosophy will always be the act of an imperceptible minority as to number, but which it will be impossible to suppress, at least to destroy, at the same time as civilisation. To maintain these powerful rivals, the one in face of the other, not to discourage those who wish to reconcile them, and in the meantime not to believe too much in the reconciliation of enemies who will fall out on the morrow, such is the only programme a truly critical mind can propose at the present time. It would be unjust to reproach the past for not having practised a toleration which is only the result (good or bad) of the intellectual state through which we are passing; but it is not less certain that liberty is the only religious code of modern times, and we can hardly conceive how, after being accustomed to regard its creeds of a fashion entirely relative, humanity will rouse itself anew to take them as the absolute truth.

## M. FEUERBACH AND THE NEW HEGELIAN SCHOOL.

EVERY considerable evolution in the field of human opinions is worthy of interest, even though we may not attach much importance to the depth of the ideas which bring it about. It is on this ground that he who is devoted to critical research cannot refuse to pay attention to the works of the Neo-Hegelian school upon Christianity, although these works have not always a truly scientific character, and have often more of the fancy of the humorist in them than the severe method of the historian.

The antipathy of the new German school to Christianity dates from Goethe. Pagan by nature, and above all by literary habit, Goethe ought not to have approved of the æsthetics which have substituted the *gamsapa* of the slave for the toga of the free man, the sickly virgin for the antique Venus, and for the perfection of the human body, represented by the gods of Greece, the emaciated image of an executed man hanging by four nails. Inaccessible to fear and unaffected by tears, Jupiter was truly the god of this great man, and we are not surprised to see him placed before his bed, exposed to the rising sun, so that he could address his prayer in the morning to the colossal head of this god.

Hegel has not pronounced less decidedly in favour of the religious idea of the Hellenes and against the introduction of Syrian or Galilean elements. The legend of Christ seems to him to have been conceived on the same



system as the Alexandrine biography of Pythagoras: it passed, according to him, into the domain of the most vulgar reality, and not at all into the poetic world. It is a mixture of mean mysticism and blank chimeras, such as we meet with among fantastic people who have no imagination. The Old and the New Testament have not in his eyes any æsthetic value.

This is the very thesis which has so many times excited the rage of Heinrich Heine. The learned school of pure *Germanists* (MM. Gervinus, Lassen, &c.), who, following the ingenious expression of Ozanam, could not pardon Christian meekness for having spoiled their bellicose ancestors, expatiate in the same sense. But M. Louis Feuerbach<sup>1</sup> has beyond doubt enunciated the most advanced, if not the most serious, expression of the antipathy of which we speak; and if the nineteenth century should see the end of the world, he it is whom we should certainly call the Antichrist. Little was wanting for M. Feuerbach to define Christianity as a perversion of human nature, and the æsthetic Christian a perversion of the innermost instincts of the heart. The perpetual lamentations of Christians for having sinned appeared to him as intolerable foolery; the humility and poverty of the monastic life are for him only the worship of the dirty and the ugly, and he readily says, like Rutilius Numatianus, "This sect, is it then, I ask you, less fatal than the poison of Circé? Circé changed the body, now these are the spirits which are changed into swine." We say it loudly and with a full amount of assurance, that we wish here to state, in opposition to these

<sup>1</sup> The most characteristic writings of M. Feuerbach and of the Neo-Hegelian School have been collected and translated by M. Herman Ewerbeck in two volumes, the one entitled, *What is Religion?* the other, *What is the Bible according to the New German Philosophy?* (Paris, 1850.) It is unfortunate that the translator, whose disinterestedness deserves praise, has mixed with his writings, which perhaps are good to know, some fragments of no value, and of which some cannot in any sense be taken seriously.

considerations of art as to views of the same order, that the critical spirit cannot admit a judgment so absolute.

A true expansion of some of the instincts of human nature, wherever there is any originality in it, must recognise and adore beauty. However sadness may please us, this æstheticism has its boldness and its grandeur. Rough and rustic, if we compare it to the learned fables of Greece, this legend, independently of its incomparable morality, possesses the great charm of simplicity, even when we look at it only from the art point of view. Good taste otherwise refuses the name of beauty to anything which does not reach perfection of form. Such is no longer our criterion. We excuse barbarism wherever we find in it an expression of a new manner of feeling and a true breath of the human soul.

Would to God that M. Feuerbach had plunged in the richest sources of life, rather than in those of his exclusive and haughty Germanism! Ah! if, seated on the ruins of Mount Palatine or Mount Caelius, he had heard the sound of the eternal bells linger and die away upon the desert hills where Rome formerly was; or if, upon the lonely place of the Lido, he had heard the chimes of St. Mark expire on the lagoon; if he had seen Assisi and its marvellous mysticism, its double basilica and the great legend of the second Christ of the Middle Ages, drawn by the pencil of Cimabue and Giotto; if he had gazed and pondered over the virgins of Perugino, or at St. Dominic of Siena he had seen St. Catherine in ecstasy, no! M. Feuerbach would not then have thus cast opprobrium on one half of human poetry, and would not have exclaimed against it as if he had wished to repel from him the phantom of Iscariot.

The mistakes of M. Feuerbach are almost always in his æsthetic judgment. The circumstances are often presented with sufficient delicacy, but always weighed with revolting severity, and with the prejudiced opinion that everything

Christian is either ugly, atrocious, or ridiculous. We might perhaps agree with him in some points of detail without partaking any of his views upon the general morality of history. Yes, the great difference between Hellenism and Christianity is that Hellenism is natural and Christianity supernatural. The religions of antiquity were the State, the family, art, and morality elevated by a lofty and poetic expression; they did not understand renunciation and sacrifice; they did not divide life: the distinction of sacred and profane did not exist for them. Antiquity, according to its manner of feeling, is upright and simple; Christianity, on the contrary, always on its guard against Nature, seeks for the strange and the paradoxical. Abstinence is better than enjoyment; goodness ought to be sought in its contrary; the wisdom of the flesh, that is to say, natural wisdom, is foolishness; the folly of the cross is wisdom. The writings of St. Paul, from the one end to the other, are they anything else than a premeditated overturning of human sense, a commentary in anticipation of the *credo quia absurdum* of Tertullian? The distinction of the flesh and the spirit, unknown to the ancients, for whom human life preserved its harmonious unity, kindled thenceforth that war between man and himself which eighteen centuries have not been able to quell.

Hence strange disordered states, counterbalanced by admirable moral conquests; errors, which antiquity had only known in the worships most infected with superstition, became contagious. Upon what was the meditation of Christian piety, the imagination of the ecstasies, exercised in preference? Was it upon the Trinity, or the Holy Spirit, or upon those dialectic dogmas which we admit as a sealed formula? No! It was upon the little child, the *santo bambino* in its cradle. No saint but what kissed its feet: St. Catherine of Siena was married to it, and such another took it in her arms. It was upon the Passion,



upon the suffering Christ. Not a saint but what had felt the imprint of his pierced hands, of his opened side: St. Madeleine de Pazzi had seen him in a dream shedding by his five wounds five streams of blood; such another had seen his heart bleeding and pierced. It was upon Mary: Mary has sufficed to satisfy the need of loving for ten centuries of ascetics. Mary has entered of full right into the Trinity; she excels by much that third forgotten Person, that Holy Spirit, without lovers or adorers. She completes the divine family; for this would have been marvellous if the feminine element in its triumph had not succeeded in mounting to the bosom of God, and between the Father and the Son had not enthroned the mother.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time the ideal of morality changes, but in some sense is raised and increased. Paganism, taking human nature as upright and good, consecrates it in its entirety, even its bad parts: there was the mistake and the error. Christianity on its side, in hurling at Nature a curse too absolute, had prepared that taste for unseemliness and meanness which carried away the Middle Ages. The ancient man, Aristides or Solon, swims peacefully in the current of life; his perfection and his imperfections are those of our nature. The Christian man mounts on the column of Stylites, abstracts himself from everything, and only taking the surface here below to place his feet on because he must, suspends himself between heaven and earth. The ideal of beauty degenerates in purity but gains in depth. The ideal is no longer ennobled Nature, the perfection of the real, the flower of that which is; the ideal becomes anti-natural—it is the corpse of a dead god; it is the *Addolorata*, pallid and veiled; it is Madeleine torturing her flesh. We would have proposed to the ancient artist

<sup>1</sup> The representations of the *Incoronata*, where Mary, placed between the Father and the Son, receives the crown from the hands of the first and the homage of the second, are the true Trinity of Christian piety.

one of those subjects which endear Christianity—the Virgin, the crucifix; but he would have repulsed it as impossible. *Ceres douloureuse* is beautiful as a woman and as a mother; but the Virgin! . . . her conception, her pregnancy, are supernatural! . . . her brothers are the angels; she has not here below either sister or husband.

So, too, when Christian art, returning to profane tradition, went to seek types of the Madonna at Albano or the Transtevere, it was a sacrilege against which the Christian conscience rightly cried out. Prometheus nailed to his rock is still beautiful, but Jesus on His cross! . . . If you seek to realise in this extended body the ideal of human forms, the harmonious proportions of Dionyseus or Apollo, if you give to the head, crowned with thorns, the lofty placidity of the Olympian Jove, it is a *contre-sense*, almost an impiety. The Byzantine Church was consistent, in maintaining with tenacity the thesis of the material homeliness of Christ. We must make him thin, emaciated, bleeding, that we may count all his bones, that we may take him for a leper, an earthworm, and not a man. "*Putarimus eum quasi leprosum. . . . Non est species ei neque decor. . . . Despectum novissimum virorum, virum dolorum et scientem infirmitatem.*"

Yes, all this is strange, new, unheard of, and St. Paul was right to call it scandal and folly. But all this is human nature; all this has come out in open day from the eternal germ of beautiful things. A great modification has been wrought in human nature; a wind, lukewarm and damp, has blown from the south and slackened its rigidity. Love has changed its object; to the enthusiasm for beauty succeeds the enthusiasm for suffering, the apotheosis of the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief, the Divine Leper, as Bossuet says.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Never has this side of Christianity been treated with more energy and originality than in the admirable sermons of Bossuet upon the Passion and upon the Compassion de la Sainte Vierge.

It is through a serious misunderstanding that we charge antiquity with the reproach of materialism. Antiquity is neither materialistic nor spiritualistic; it is human. Ancient life, so serene, so pleasant in its narrow proportions, wanted space by the side of the infinite. See those charming little houses of Pompeii. Like those, it is gay, perfect, but narrow and without horizon. Everywhere repose and joy, everywhere images of goodness and pleasure; but that suffices no longer. We no longer conceive life without sadness. Saturated as we are with our supernaturalist ideas and our thirst for the infinite, that art so limited, that morality so simple, that system of life so well agreed on by all, seems to us a mean realism. Castor and Pollux, Diana and Minerva, are for us cold images, because they represent healthy and normal nature. Let us take care, however: these grand airs of abstinence and sacrifice are often only a refinement of the instincts which content themselves with the contrary. Christian spiritualism is at the bottom much more sensual than what we call ancient materialism,<sup>1</sup> and sometimes resembles relaxation. The Dorian Artemis, that masculine young girl who touched the severe Hippolyta, has always seemed to me to be more austere than the dear St. Elizabeth who has made M. De Montalembert so desperately amorous. Those who have visited Naples have been able to see at the Chapel della Pietà de Sangri a *pudicizia*, covered with a long veil, which covers the whole person in such a way as to leave one to guess under the marble folds a form rendered more attractive by the mystery. On the other hand, there is in the Museum of the Vatican an antique Modesty, half-naked, but veiled by its severe beauty. Which do you

<sup>1</sup> I only speak of the lofty and pure Greek antiquity. I ought to observe also that the business here, before all, is a question of æsthetics and taste—a question which must be resolved by an examination of the works of art and poetry.



believe is indeed the most chaste? Greece, with an exquisite tact, has perceived perfect proportion in everything; it has seized the slightest shades in an instant, but where can we maintain it? Proportion, indeed, appears cold and wearisome in the long-run; we weary ourselves with proportion and good taste. Types perfectly pure no longer suffice; we want the strange, the superhuman, the supernatural.

It is not by the fault of individuals or systems that religious sentiments undergo these profound revolutions. It is not voluntarily that man quits the smooth and easy paths of the plain for the rugged and romantic crags of the mountain. It is because measure and proportion, representing only the finite become insufficient for the heart which aspires to the infinite. Whilst humanity is shut up within precise and narrow limits, she reposes and is happy in her mediocrity; when she listens to much greater needs, she becomes exacting and unhappy, but in a sense more noble, and will prefer, both in art and in morality, suffering, unsated desire, that vague and painful sensation which the infinite produces, to the full and complete satisfaction which is yielded by a finished work.

If there is an incurable evil, thanks to God it is that. The delicate are unfortunate, but we cannot cure delicacy. We can recognise a broken spirit, but we cannot redress it. But then deviation has so many charms, and uprightness is so fastidious. An ancient temple has incontestably a purer beauty than a Gothic church, and yet we pass hours in the one without fatigue, whilst we cannot remain five minutes in the other without weariness. That proves, according to M. Feuerbach, that we are perverted. But does it?

If M. Feuerbach has confined himself to showing these contrasts with calmness and with gentleness; if, content to observe curiously the alternatives of human feelings, he

should not have opposed to the often gratuitous enthusiasm of the believer, a hatred more gratuitous still, we then should not have had the right to be so severe upon him. But the impartial philosopher should not lend himself to the absolute condemnation which M. Feuerbach hurls against eighteen centuries of the history of the human mind; for he should reflect that it is the human spirit itself which is on trial. It serves no good purpose to express his hatred against the words of Christianity, theology, &c. What then has Christianity done? What has theology done? Humanity does not accept any other chains than those which she imposes on herself. Humanity has done everything, and—we wish to believe it—done it well. Otherwise, it is not only supernaturalism which falls under the criticism of the new German school. M. Feuerbach and all the philosophers of that school declare, without hesitation, that theism, natural religion, in a word, every system which admits anything transcendental, ought to be put upon the same footing as supernaturalism. To believe in God and the immortality of the soul is, in his eyes, as superstitious as to believe in the Trinity and the miracles. Criticism of heaven is, according to him, only criticism of the earth; theology ought to become anthropology. Every consideration of a superior world, every look cast by man beyond himself and the real, every religious sentiment, under whatever form it manifests itself, is only a delusion. In order not to be severe towards a philosopher of his kind, we would wish to think we have misunderstood him. M. Feuerbach has written at the head of the second edition of his *Essence of Christianity*: “By this book I have embroiled myself with God and the world.” We believe that it is a little his fault, and that he has wished that God and the world would have pardoned him. Led away by that evil tone which governs the German universities, and which I

would willingly call the *hardihood of pedantry*, many upright minds and honest souls have attributed to them, without deserving it, the honours of atheism. When a German boasts of being impious, we must not believe him on his word. The German is not capable of being irreligious: religion, that is to say, the aspiration towards the ideal world, is the very foundation of his nature. When he wishes to be atheistical, he is devoutly so, and with a sort of unction. It is thus he practises the worship of the beautiful and the true; it is thus the holiness of morality speaks to his heart; it is thus all beauty and all truth leads him back to the home of the holy life; it is thus, when he has arrived there, he renounces at a word, he muffles his head, his thoughts are confounded, and his language is confined to saying nothing in the face of the infinite; how dares he talk of atheism? If your faculties, vibrating simultaneously, have never returned this grand unique sound which we call God, I have nothing more to say; you are deficient in the essential and characteristic element of our nature.

To those who, placing themselves at this point of view of the subject, shall ask me, Is this God or is he not? "Oh, God," I shall answer, "it is he who is, and all the rest which appears to be." Supposing even that for us philosophers another word was preferable, beyond that, abstract words do not sufficiently clearly express the real existence. It would be an immense inconvenience to us thus to divide altogether the poetic sources of the past, and to separate us by our language from the simple people who worship so well after their manner. The word God being in possession of the respect of humanity, this word having for itself a long prescription, and having been employed in all beautiful poetry, it would be to overturn all the habits of language, to abandon it. Tell the simple to live according to their aspirations for the truth, beauty, and good



morality, these words would not have any sense for them. Tell them to love God, not to offend God, and they will understand you thoroughly. God, providence, immortality, so many good old words, a little dull perhaps, but philosophy will interpret them in a sense more and more refined, although she will never replace them with advantage. Under one form or another, God will always be the summary of our suprasensible needs, the category of the ideal, that is to say (the form under which we conceive the ideal), as space and time are the categories of the body (that is to say, the forms under which we conceive the body). In other terms, man placed before beautiful, good, or true things, goes out of himself; and, suspended by a celestial charm, his puny personality becomes nothing—he is exalted, he is absorbed. What is that, if it is not adoration?

## ‘THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST.’

By M. ARY SCHEFFER.

THE public, always sympathetic towards the works of M. Ary Scheffer, will learn with pleasure that the painter of *Marguerite* and of *Francisca di Rimini* is about to put the finishing touches to a picture which we are persuaded will outweigh, in the estimation of his admirers, the charm of his finest compositions. The temptation of Christ upon the mountain could not fail to inspire the excellent artist who has endeavoured, better than any other, to embody moral ideas, and fix the image of all that enchants, makes us better, and softens us. This simple and grand subject has hardly had justice done to it until now in this picture. I do not know any picture of any master which represents it. A scene where the Son of God is shown to us as subject to our moral trials and struggling as an equal with Satan, presents Christ from a side too human to please the exalted faith of an orthodox age. The Middle Ages, it is true, sometimes tried it in the series of figures of Biblical history; but in treating it, they never freed it from the grotesque and the fanciful. Satan, to the miniature painters, was a sort of burlesque harlequin, muffled in a hood and with a distorted mask, or as an ærial vision, a sort of nightmare reflected in space; a conception not without some degree of originality, but from which no moral sentiment could be drawn. M. Scheffer has endeavoured from the first to elucidate the true symbolic significance of the passage in the Gospel, and in separating the

details, which bear too deeply the stamp of the epoch and the country where the legend was formed, to interpret it by a convenient method according to the religious ideas of our time.

Evangelical scenes afford the marvellous advantage to the artist of resting on a gift admitted by all, already idealised in the conscience of each, and which the imagination surrounds with the prestige of holiness. The artist does not create the poetry of his subjects; he receives it ready-made: the half of his work must have been already sketched by the popular belief, and opinion have surrounded with aureoles the heads of his heroes. The first condition of grand art is a collection of religious ideas, received from all, and from the artist himself, not as a dogmatic symbol—that is sufficiently indifferent (Perugino, they say, denied God and the soul; the age which inspired the Stanza and the Sixtine was somewhat sceptical)—but as a sort of common language by which all understand it. The painter has not, any more than the poet, the right to make his mythology for himself; every time that he, not content to express a cycle of received legends, wishes to invent his poem, he falls into allegory, and gradually into enigma. The public rarely appreciate those dogmas of painters and sculptors which, in order to be understood, require an explanatory *libretto*. On the contrary, when he undertakes to interpret poetic and religious themes agreed upon by all, full liberty ought to be left to the artist. The most liberal exegesis, the easiest theology, very near the counter-sense, all will be good, provided that it is on a known subject, and will succeed in exciting in us a sentiment of the good and the beautiful. Symbols only signify what we direct them to signify; man makes holiness of what he believes, as he does beauty of what he loves. The revered texts, thanks to our habit of connecting our religious emotions with them, and to that breadth



of mind which allows us to find in it what we desire, become thus a vast shade, where all good thoughts find for themselves shelter.

Understood in an elevated sense, the scene chosen by M. Scheffer is truly one of the most solemn in the Gospel. There is in all divine missions a sort of decisive moment when the thought from above finds itself struggling with inferior thoughts, and when human weakness becomes frightened at the burthen of the apostolate. Nearly all great vocations—and this is one of the marks of their celestial origin—have begun by trouble, timidity, and temptation. The first time that Moses saw God in Horeb, he murmured, sought for pretexts, and made difficulties. Joan of Arc hesitated between her village, her house adjoining the church, her little companions, and the voices from Heaven. When the Buddha, Sakya Mouni, conceived the project of delivering creation from change and from death, and of attaining by annihilation of his personality to supreme intelligence, he had to conquer all the powers of Nature, which were leagued for the purpose of drawing him away from his design and rendering it abortive.<sup>1</sup> Mahomet, who did not always resist as much as he ought to have done the enticements of Satan, but who at first was animated by very pure religious feelings, struggled for a long time in the stony valleys adjacent to Mecca. The first appearances of his prophetic genius were accompanied by great trouble; often he returned to his home depressed and discouraged: Khadija consoled him and confirmed his faith. How many others, called upon to bear the Word of God, have succumbed in the trial, and have given way to the suggestions of Satan, "I will give thee all that, if thou wilt worship me!"

<sup>1</sup> See the *Lalita Vistara, or Life of Buddha*, translated by Ph. Ed. Foucaux, pp. 251, 286, 352. Compare *L'Avesta*, translated by Spiegel, vol. i. p. 242 et seq.

More free than the theologian, and above all, than the critic, the artist can even suppose that at the beginning of his mission, when Christ meditated the salvation of the world, the idea of an earthly empire based upon violence crossed his spirit for the moment. Instead of a redemption by faith and by the purification of souls, he could dream of a redemption by the sword. The question: Christ or Mahomet? Shall the world be saved by the Word or by conquest, by persuasion or by force—is placed before him. Such is the moment chosen by M. Ary Scheffer. Upon a peak standing out boldly in space—the precipitous sides falling steeply down the abyss seemed to measure the height—it was there the mystery of the supreme struggle took place; the universe was to be the prize. Heavenly thought and infernal thought, good and evil, are there alone in presence of each other in the region of the clouds. We do not see the world, the fate of which is to be decided on these heights. Satan with his fingers outstretched shows and offers him the kingdoms of the earth. Everything in him breathes immoral and disdainful scepticism; he does not understand that there is anything noble in human nature. The believer, as he imagines, is solely governed by egotism and cupidity; he is doing him too much honour in supposing him capable of obeying anything else than imposture. *Mundus vult decipi.* The Satan of M. Scheffer is the ambitious, the political, the worldly man, who endeavours to conquer the world by lies, violence, and contempt. In that, he is less skilful than he thinks; he deceives himself, and is disappointed, as are all who appeal to the baseness of human nature and take no count of its lofty instincts. Christ, without any effort, points to the sky and repels the infernal suggestion by the sentiment of his divine nature. At the thought of a profane kingdom he opposes the spiritual formula, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Immovable in the faith of

his mission, he is not touched, and only answers the beguiler by a look full of meekness and compassion. I will almost say that he is not tempted, and I praise M. Scheffer for having modified in that the traditional data. To be tempted is to be half vanquished. The proper thing for the Son of God is to arrive at this lofty region, where the soul, strongly seated in its idea of moral beauty, can still be beset, but is placed by its nobility in the happy impossibility of doing wrong.

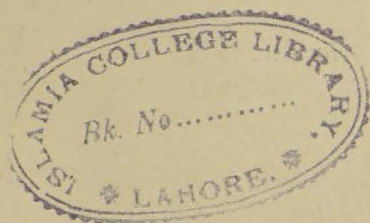
Nothing equals the calm, the grandeur, the lofty serenity of the Christ of M. Scheffer. His celestial origin shows well forth in the majesty of his bearing, in his lofty size, in his high and proud posture, rather than in the circle of hieratic light which surrounds his head. There are all the essential characteristics of beauty, not as antique art understood them, in their material crudity always somewhat brutalised, but moderated, deadened, and refined, by a fast of forty days, by the solitude and the cold of the mountain. We will say, however, and to our mind it is not a criticism, that the Satan of M. Ary Scheffer appears to us to be superior to the Christ. The evil is more easy to express than the good, Hell than Paradise. The good is uniform, I should say almost monotonous. The good is by its very nature above every image, and we lower it in some degree when we try to express it by material features. If the figure of Christ was finished by the pencil of angels, like the Madonna of Angelico, it would always be inferior to our ideal. Evil, on the contrary, affords a variety and infinite shades. Evil should be banished from this world, that it might be permitted to the artist to preserve it as a mythological personage and an excellent fiction. Of all the beings, formerly accursed, that the toleration of our times has relieved from their anathema, Satan has undoubtedly gained most by the progress of enlightenment and universal civilisation. He has become softened by degrees



in his long journey from Persia to us ; he has been stripped of all the wickedness of Ahrimanes. The Middle Ages, which understood nothing of toleration, made him as they liked, ugly and wicked ; they tortured him in order to heap upon him disgrace and ridicule. Milton understood at last this poor calumniated being, and began a metamorphosis which the lofty impartiality of our time ought to complete. An age as fruitful as ours in rehabilitations of all kinds ought not to want reasons for excusing an unfortunate rebel whom the necessity for action forced into a hazardous enterprise. We can bring to bear, in order to extenuate his fault, a number of motives against which there could be no right of being severe. But I prefer to attribute our toleration to a better cause, and to suppose that if we are inclined to be indulgent to Satan, it is that Satan has been stripped of one part of his malice, and is no longer the dismal spirit, the object of so much hatred and terror. Evil is evidently in our days less strong than it was formerly, and our toleration even, is it not the best proof that good has triumphed ?

It is of this we are convinced when in the presence of the picture we have endeavoured to interpret. Beautiful, like all noble creations, more unfortunate than wicked, the Satan of M. Scheffer signalises the last effort of art to break with dualism, and to attribute evil to the same source as good in the heart of man. One of the most delicate thoughts of the great artist has been to give to the infernal genius, the feeling of his inferiority. This last effort to oppose himself to the work of the Son of God is for him a desperate attempt, and he feels that his reign is at an end. This is, without doubt, what has so greatly softened him. He has lost his horns and his claws ; he has only kept his wings, appendages which alone connect him with the supernatural world, and are preserved only that he may attend the triumph of the pure human form,

represented by Christ under the hybrid form of a mythological being. He wants vigour perhaps, and that I rejoice at. It was allowable in the Middle Ages, when they lived constantly in the presence of evil, strong-armed and embattled, for him to carry that implacable hatred which art depicts by a sombre energy. We are obliged at the present day by less strictness. Our optimism in æsthetics is sometimes a reproach to us; they blame us for not being more severe upon evil, more exclusive in our taste for beauty; but in reality there is a delicacy of conscience in this. It is from love of the beautiful and of the good that we are so timid, sometimes so weak, in our moral judgment. The absolute ages cut, they mowed, a field in order to pull up the tares. We, who respect the divine spark everywhere wherever it shines, and are accustomed after a more liberal manner to look upon human things, know that evil and good are intermingled here below in undistinguishable proportions; we hesitate to pronounce exclusive judgments for fear of including in our condemnation some atoms of beauty. In this sense the Satan of M. Ary Scheffer appears to me a consolatory sign of progress. In order to depict evil with so little anger and so much pity, the reign of evil must have been weakened; we can treat a disarmed enemy only with such gentleness. If evil at the bottom inspires us with less hatred, it does not inspire us with less disgust. The moral sentiment of our days is more delicate than it has ever been, but it does not translate itself into anathema. This, it seems to me, is the answer we ought to make to those who accuse our age of scepticism. We are sceptics, perhaps, upon abstract formulas, but not upon the essential truths which are the principles of all human nobility. Every day we make sacrifices for our faith, and when they ask us to formulate that faith, we know not what to answer. We are not the Pharisee who gains Paradise without any effort, and knows







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