

THE CHRIST OF M. RENAN
AND
THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPELS.

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I.

WHICH was Jesus Christ : man, or God ?

We cannot ask this question in the present day without at once calling to mind a famous work, "The Life of Jesus," by M. Renan. It is useless, we are told, to attempt to enlighten one's audience by simply reading the Gospels, since, in estimating their worth, we are compelled to remember a book, the novelty of which, if not its value, is attested by a circulation in France of 15,000 copies.

We therefore hold it, for the present, to be impossible to enter upon the study of the life of Jesus Christ

without in some way encountering the work of his most modern historian. This is the task before us now.

Our personal knowledge of a writer is not always necessary to enable us to judge of his work. Thus, for example, it is perfectly needless that we should be acquainted with either the morals or the creed of a mathematician in order to appreciate his treatises on algebra and geometry. Such, however, is not the case as regards a philosopher, or even an historian. Here it is evident that the writer's doctrines must influence his decisions. Even unconsciously the author will magnify the men and the systems which are in agreement with himself, whilst he will very heartily despise the persons who differ from him. To know, then, whether M. Renan is in danger either of abasing or exalting Jesus Christ, it is necessary that we should become acquainted with his philosophical or religious principles. We shall not seek our information either in the author's life or in his previous works, but exclusively (with the exception of one single reference) in the volume we are studying. Judging only, then, from "The Life of Jesus," what are M. Renan's beliefs?

And, first, does M. Renan believe in God, or not? If

he does, what is his God—spirit or matter? a person or a thing? To use familiar terms, is M. Renan a Deist or a Pantheist?—He is neither.

What, then, is his God? He tells us elsewhere that the name of his God is, "*Our Father, the Abyss.*" This truly happy term is in itself an exposition of doctrine concerning the Deity: it is a declaration that he who adopts the name sees no more clearly into the idea of a God than one can see into an abyss. M. Renan does not affirm that there is no God, but simply that he does not know him. Is it possible to believe in a God of whom we have no distinct notion? No. The theory of "*Our Father, the Abyss,*" will be powerless in our life: this is all we can say for it.

In the next place, what is M. Renan's idea of man? A single sentence from his book will tell us. At page 2 he says: "*Man, as soon as he rose above the animal, became religious.*" If there was a time when man rose above the animal, there must have been a previous stage in which he was not distinct from it, and at this stage man was simply the first of the animals. Whether he was a monkey or an elephant we do not know, but at least he was a member of the family. Whether we like it or not, we are no more than perfected beasts.

Now, between this Father-Abyss and this man the child of the brute, what religious relationship has been established? It could not have been very clear, since it emanated from a God of darkness; nor very close, since it applied to the descendants of humanized brutes. In fact, we shall see, that in spite of all the clearness and the strength which this principle has acquired during the progress of ages, it is still, according to M. Renan, very obscure and very weak.

This supposed relation between man and God varies strangely according as you consult various philosophers and theologians. Some resolve it into love, others into obedience; some demand from us an entire consecration, others speak of ten commandments, and others again of only two. According to Christians, man must be just, pure, faithful; he must honour God, love his brethren, and have respect for their lives, their goods, and their homes. Were we to admit duties so numerous and so imperative, it would be but too easy to convict M. Renan's morality of great incompleteness; we do not, therefore, propose to examine it on all these points. We shall test it only on one point—a point very simple, very elementary, and absolutely indisputable. This one unassailable point is *veracity*. Ought man to be sin-

cere and truthful, or is he at liberty to weaken the rich wine of truth by mixing it, more or less, with the water of falsehood? Let us listen to M. Renan in a series of confessions which cannot but be truly sincere, since they are made for the benefit of readers whom he believes to be in sympathy with himself.

M. Renan, with the air of a legislating moralist, says, "To enable it to bear its burden, humanity has need of the belief that it does not receive its full reward in this life. The greatest service we can render it is frequently to repeat that it does not live by bread alone" (p. 184).

Humanity, then, believes in another life. But why? Is it because this belief is true? No; but it is in order that humanity might be enabled to bear its burden. In order, then, to do it service and to encourage it, it would be desirable, not to teach, but to proclaim to it, and "frequently to repeat, that it does not live by bread alone."

This language is clever, and the thought is well concealed: but let us tear away the veil and then we shall read as follows: Without faith in the future, man would not patiently bear his burden; for prudential reasons, therefore, let us persuade him that after the day of this

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short life there comes a long and blessed morrow. We must convince man of this, not because it is true, but because faith in this dogma will ensure the welfare of those whom this life dissatisfies.

Our readers, then, need not be surprised if M. Renan, adversary of Jesus as he is, should nevertheless think it wise to preserve a certain faith in a future world, for he teaches us (p. 237) that there are such things as "innocent deceptions." Besides, he distinctly says (p. 316), that "in order to obtain from humanity the less, you must claim from it the greater." He is so firm a believer in the efficacy, and, if we may say so, in the lawfulness of falsehood, that he adds, "the immense moral progress due to the gospel comes from its exaggerations."

Laying aside the gospel for the present, let us bear in mind the above profession of faith—an immense moral progress is to be obtained by means of exaggerations. If therefore M. Renan should ever teach morality, he will recommend exaggeration.

The above quotations are not the only ones of the kind to be found in his work. Here, for instance, is another: "It is because of its double meaning that his thought [that of Jesus] has become fruitful" (p. 282). When, therefore, you are anxious to succeed in morals,

use duplicity; M. Renan will ensure you success. But possibly we may have wrongly interpreted this "thought" with the "double meaning;" perhaps it is meant that the thought was true in both its aspects? No, for the author adds, "his chimera has not shared the fate of so many besides; . . . it concealed a germ of life, which, introduced into the bosom of humanity (thanks to its fabulous surroundings), has borne there some everlasting fruits" (p. 282).

This double-faced thought, then, was a *chimera*, and this chimera, thanks to its *fabulous surroundings*, has borne some everlasting fruits!

Moralists, philosophers, legislators, do you wish for a people who shall be perpetually moral, wise, and peaceful? Teach it a chimera enveloped in fable, and M. Renan guarantees your success. In any case, whether you reckon upon this success or not, bear in mind that M. Renan thinks that there are innocent frauds, fertile thoughts with double meanings, and that in order to obtain a little from humanity it is necessary to exact much.

It is not meant, indeed, that all falsehoods are equally efficacious. No; one must know how to choose between them; and the best are those which have their

foundation in the prejudices of the age or the nation in which we live. With this caution it is possible to transform a folly into a great truth! Thus, listen: "Jesus, by accepting the Utopias of his time and of his race, could, thanks to some fertile misconceptions, transform them into exalted truths" (p. 284).

We do not complain that M. Renan should profess to believe that Jesus relied on the Utopias of his age, and that he had recourse to misconceptions. What we wish to point out is the principle accepted by M. Renan; viz., that great truths were the offspring of these Utopias and misconceptions, and that good was the result of error and falsehood. It is not with Jesus, but with his historian, that, for the moment, we have to do.

We have no wish unduly to prolong the study of his principles in this matter of veracity; nor are we anxious to comment upon them, since our readers may do it for themselves: we therefore, in concluding on this point, confine ourselves to the quotation of a final passage. Our own thoughts upon it will be indicated by simply italicising.

"In the East," says our author, "there are a thousand evasions and subterfuges between good faith and imposture. . . . Real truth is of very little value to

the Easterns: they look at everything through the media of their ideas, their interests, and their passions.

"History would be impossible if one did not openly admit that sincerity has many degrees. All great things are achieved by the masses. Now we do not lead them except by lending ourselves to their ideas. The philosopher who, knowing this, nevertheless isolates himself, and retreats within his own nobleness, is highly praiseworthy; but he who takes humanity *with its illusions, and seeks to act both upon and with it, must not be blamed.* . . . It is easy for us, impotent as we are, to call this, falsehood, and, proud of our *timid* honesty, to treat with scorn the heroes who have accepted the battle of life on other terms. *When by our scruples we shall have achieved as much as they did with their falsehoods, we shall have the right to be more severe towards them*" (pp. 252, 253).

It will thus be seen that, in our author's estimation, the success which is achieved justifies the means used. Whosoever accomplishes great things by means of falsehood may claim the indulgence of those who have only done little things by means of truth.

Well, M. Renan,—No! At the risk of being called "rustics," we again say, No! We prefer to be

truthful, though without worldly success, than to be triumphant impostors. Our conscience protests against your immoral principles, and we must say so in passing.

We are not concerned with ourselves, however, but with M. Renan and the principles he extols. From all that has preceded we think ourselves warranted in concluding that, according to our author, sincerity and truthfulness are elastic, that we may have more or less of them, and that in the event of success no one has the right to be severe towards the impostor who brings his falsehood to a successful issue.

Who now needs be surprised that M. Renan should ascribe to Jesus the doctrines he himself judges to be good? He is anxious to justify those who have learned in this way to secure their triumphs: to ask for more would be too severe. Besides, Jesus lived in the East. M. Renan does not require of him on behalf of truth a platonic love which he, the author, does not himself profess. Hence we shall now see in the *Life of Jesus*, as it is imagined and interpreted by M. Renan, the hero contenting himself with the same measure of truth which is to be found in the writer. But let us remember that in this estimate it is M. Renan's picture that we

have in that of Jesus. Put in his place, we shall now see what M. Renan would have said and done.

II.

It must be understood that Jesus, whether we pronounce him to be a God or an impostor, could not fail to be convinced of his own great superiority over his contemporaries. Thus M. Renan supposes that he treated them with a "transcendent scorn," and that he indulged in "subtle railing" at them. For example, when the disciples, carried away by a spirit of revenge, ask their Master to punish those who refuse them hospitality, by calling down upon them fire from heaven, Jésus, grieved at heart, says to them, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." M. Renan sees in this holy answer nothing but a "refined irony"! Thus a "transcendent scorn," a "subtle raillery," and a "refined sarcasm," mark the tone of this "master of irony" discovered by M. Renan. Can we find in the sacred text, or even in the profane writings of the period, a single word to authorize this estimate? Not a single one! But this "refined irony and railing," and this "transcendent scorn," are fashionable in our day; and the writer, who has taken his degree in these arts, attributes

them to his hero. Thus M. Renan says of Jesus, "His exquisite derisions, his mischievous provocations, always pierced to the heart. Masterpieces of fine raillery, his strokes are inscribed in lines of fire on the flesh of the hypocrite . . . Incomparable strokes, and worthy of a Son of God! A God alone can kill after this fashion. Socrates and Molière only graze the skin: this man sends fire and fury to the very bones" (p. 334).

Here is a noble superiority of Jesus over Molière! Molière merely grazes the skin, but Jesus kills! Such is the admiration accorded to the Saviour! Such are the praises M. Renan gives his hero! Ah! we may now understand why Jesus, though silent when he was scourged, yet sighed when he received a certain kiss.

If the Jesus invented by M. Renan was a mocker and a railer, one need not be surprised at the discovery that he was vain: wit and vanity are so nearly allied. Thus, according to Renan, he willingly allowed men to give him a qualification which did not belong to him; he even acted a part! His historian informs us that when the title of Messiah, or of Son of David, was given to him, he accepted it with pleasure (pp. 238, 132). If a miracle-monger sought to make capital for

himself out of the popular credulity, "Jesus saw in this a homage paid to his own renown, and was not, therefore, too severe" (p. 295). One day his friends went even so far as to get up the farce of a resurrection, and Jesus consented to play his part in it (p. 363).

In order, however, that this assumed character of miracle-worker may be invested with more likelihood, we are told that Jesus took it unwillingly (p. 264), and even in spite of himself (p. 268). "Sometimes Jesus made use of innocent artifices. . . . He pretended to know some secret respecting the person he wished to gain over to his side. . . . Concealing the real source of his power, he allowed it to be thought . . . that a revelation from above revealed secrets to him" (p. 162). "It was by a contradiction that the success of his work was ensured" (p. 126).

Better still, with somewhat of irony, M. Renan makes us feel that if we resolve on being more sincere than Jesus we shall miss the end which he attained. "Let us continue," says he, with the subtlety he ascribed to another—"let us continue to admire the morality of the gospel; let us suppress from our religious instructions the delusion which was the soul of it; but let us not suppose that the

world is to be moved by the simple ideas of individual happiness or morality. The idea of Jesus must be taken as a whole, without those timid suppressions which take away from it precisely that which made it efficacious in the regeneration of humanity" (p. 125). And so, a delusion regenerated humanity! Let us pass on, however: the above is our author's opinion, and it is perfectly natural that he should have attributed it to his hero.

But may not M. Renan, who approves the use of these flexible laws of truth, and ascribes it to Jesus, have used them himself? May he not have done in his book what Jesus is said to have practised in his work? May he not himself also have employed this irony, this subtlety, this railing, and this transcendent scorn? We are all the more authorized to believe so, not only because in principle he approves of this supple truth, but also because he avows his determination to make use of it. In his Preface, speaking of the historical documents which may prove not to be in perfect agreement with each other, M. Renan tells us that "they must be gently enticed, so as to bring them together" (p. lvi). Here is indeed our critic's great secret: an *enticing* of texts, so that they

may be brought to say what he desires.* We shall soon see him at this subterranean work. Will he entice the texts in favour of Jesus, or to his disadvantage? What has preceded may have aroused our suspicions: these suspicions will be confirmed by facts. It is simply natural that a writer who extols Oriental insincerity, and even ascribes it to genius, should make use of it himself against his adversary Jesus Christ.

III.

We all know the story of that poor widow who, lacking the very necessities of life, nevertheless casts into the treasury the two mites which are all that remains to her; and we all think, with Jesus, that inasmuch as this woman has given all "her living," she has done more than the rich, who, in spite of their large gifts,

* By this method we undertake to make *oui* (*yes*) mean *non* (*no*). Do our readers doubt it? Listen. First of all, it is a simple fact that *oui* and *non* are nearly related: *oui* is a monosyllable, *non* is a monosyllable; *oui* has three letters, *non* has also three letters; *oui* contains an *o*, *non* also contains an *o*. Do not be surprised that *oui* should have an *u*, and *non* an *n*. Do you not see that *u* is only *n* upside down? If there are two *n*'s in *non* (*no*) it is simply the same letter doubled; and if there is an *i* in *oui* (*yes*), the Greeks will tell you that it must be an iôta subscribed. You see then, that by "gently enticing" it, *no* (*non*) means *yes* (*oui*).

have only given of their abundance. Well, we are all mistaken; and M. Renan, by his process of "entice-ment," learns from the narrative that the intention of Jesus was "to extol the poor who gave little, and to humble the rich who gave much" (p. 339).

Again, we all know the parable of the rich man who, clothed in purple, and living sumptuously every day, leaves Lazarus at his gate to die of sickness and hunger. We have all felt that the lesson to be learned is in the contrast between selfish opulence and resigned poverty. Our able critic has seen neither this selfishness nor this resignation: by "gently enticing" the text he makes it portray, not a bad rich man, but simply a rich man without the badness.*

The design of this is that Jesus may be suspected of

* In order to a complete analysis too many details are necessary. Our author has the art of sheltering himself behind the letter: his real purpose is discovered only in the spirit of his book. Thus, in his exposition of this parable he says, "He [the rich man] is in hell because he is rich; because he does not give his property to the poor; because he dines well, whilst others at his gate dine poorly." And, indeed, what great harm is there in dining well, whilst others starve? Ah! if we were poor we might understand it better. Specially so if the hard contrast between such luxury and misery, good living and sores, lasted our whole life-time, and if, every day, we were refused the crumbs given in preference to the dogs!

loving the poor better than the rich, and therefore suspected of communism by readers who are more or less wealthy.

The Gospels acquaint us with two facts concerning John the Baptist which, if made to be contemporaneous, would be contradictory, but which, if placed under their several dates, harmonize with each other. At the commencement of his ministry the Precursor places himself below Jesus; but towards the close of his life John sends two of his disciples with the question, "Art thou he that should come?" What does M. Renan? He treats them as contemporaneous, and charges the first statement with exaggeration, in order to give the more weight to the second, in which John expresses his doubts respecting Jesus (p. 202).

Elsewhere M. Renan is anxious to eliminate from the gospel the central idea on which the Christian doctrine rests; namely, redemption. For this purpose he examines the texts which bear upon the Lord's Supper, the emblem of his expiatory death. Our author, in the first place, gratuitously supposes that "Jesus was fond of the opportunity afforded at meal-times for taking the lead in light and pleasant conversation. Sharing the same loaf in common was considered as a sort of fellow-

ship. In giving expression to his thought Jesus said to his disciples, I am your food ; that is, my flesh is your bread, my blood is your wine. . . . Then he would further say, This is my body ; this is my blood " (pp. 303, 304).

Is not this an admirable use of texts? First, ordinary meals are supposed ; then the bread which is common to all becomes the type of communion ; then, as the third supposition, Jesus is led from this to represent himself as the food of his disciples. Then the word "food," which is introduced in the supper by M. Renan, gives place to the phrases, "This is my body," "This is my blood ;" and so, thanks to a series of "enticements," a *unique* fact—the great fact of the Last Supper—is transformed into a common habit Jesus had acquired. It is no more than one of the pleasant dinner parties of which Jesus was so fond ! Hence, to make this "enticement" all the more easy, great care is taken to suppress the words, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer ;" and, "My blood, which is shed for you." Is there, then, so much pleasantness in conversing about one's sufferings, and the announcement of one's own death ? Yet it is in these very words, "I have desired," that M. Renan

sees the proof that "Jesus was fond of these dinner parties"!*

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When there can be no question as to the *nature* of the love felt for Jesus—as, for instance, when it is the love of the disciples in general, and not that of a few women in particular—the means are still found of falsifying the truth by a clever trick. It is well known that Jesus offered salvation to the repenting sinner. M. Renan alters this, and says, "This charming doctor forgave every one who loved him" (p. 219). After having thus parodied a doctrine which leads through repentance to holiness, into a feeling which much resembles egotism, M. Renan reduces the model disciples of Jesus to very nearly the standard of children. "Jesus," he says, "almost confounds the idea of the disciple with that of the child. . . . He who is humble as this little one, is greatest in the

* A passage is here omitted in which Renan is shown to make insinuations against the character of our Lord so offensive and revolting, that they cannot be reproduced in English without shocking the feelings of our readers beyond endurance. Well may M. Roussel say: "Let us draw the veil before these horrible insinuations, whose very timidity discloses a dread of wounding the public sentiment, and is a better proof of the hero's holiness than of the historian's moderation."

kingdom of heaven" (p. 192). According to the words of Jesus, it is not the child as such, but his humility, which is held up as an example. Has our clever critic found out that humility is *almost* the whole of childhood?

After all these insinuations, Jesus is represented as "making progress in his fanaticism." We, on the contrary, see M. Renan progressing in his recklessness. Gathering strength from the past achievements of his pen, he advances more boldly in his accusations, and he does not hesitate to say, "By detaching man from the earth, his life was shattered. The Christian henceforth is to receive praise for being a bad son and a bad citizen, provided it be for Christ's sake that he resists his parents and opposes his country" (p. 314). Surely if a mere man, especially if a wicked man, were to demand obedience to his commands to the neglect of the righteous laws of a father or of a monarch, we should refuse it. Does M. Renan forget that Jesus claims to be the only Son of a God who cannot command that which is wrong? or does he maintain that a son or a subject must, *under any circumstances*, obey his father or his king? Was Salome right, then, when in obedience to her mother she asked for the head of John

the Baptist? Was Nero's slave right when by the emperor's orders he stabbed Agrippina? Is not the moral law within us above that of a father and of a monarch? Is it necessary to violate conscience in order to be a good son or a good citizen? M. Renan dares not say so; but here, as elsewhere, in order to justify his opposition to Jesus, he begins by assuming, without proof, that this Jesus is not the Christ, the Son of God.

M. Renan rejects no means of assault upon the work of Jesus. Anxious to set aside the prediction of the ruin of Jerusalem, he is content to say that Jesus guessed it, forgetting that in his Introduction (p. xvii.) he had declared the Gospel of Luke to be posterior to the siege of that city, for the sole reason that the details of the catastrophe are too minute. Thus, at one time the prophecy is correct, but then it is only a guess; whilst at another time it is a fraud written after the event.

At page 343 we find another contradiction. Jesus seeks misunderstandings, and designedly prolongs them; then, in a note, the author questions the authenticity of the passage. If the passage be not authentic this search after misunderstandings never took place, and

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the wiser course in this state of doubtfulness would have been to set aside both the note and the explanation. The able critic, on the contrary, extracts from the whole two accusations: he quotes the passage from the sacred text in order to accuse Jesus of a want of straightforwardness; then he questions the authenticity of the quotation in order to discredit the book from which it is made. Thus a word which may not have been spoken becomes a two-edged sword, striking in turn both Jesus and the Gospels!

We proceed to another piece of skill. Jesus, describing those who in his day had the courage to brave persecution by declaring themselves his disciples, and the strength to conquer their lusts by remaining pure in the midst of the general corruption, calls them violent men; that is, characterized by a spiritual violence used against themselves, thereby conquering the fear of a persecuting world and the passions of a sinful nature.

M. Renan, who is on the alert to catch every expression that may bear a double meaning, pauses at this one. In this moral violence done to one's self he sees a physical violence done to an adversary; and the following are the terms in which he falsifies the meaning of

Jesus: "The kingdom of God cannot be conquered without violence: it is by means of crises and upheavings that it must be established" (p. 237).

Truly; but with this difference, that Jesus speaks of a moral violence done by Christians to themselves, whilst what is substituted for this is a brutal violence done by the same Christians to their adversaries. It is not one and the same thing to slay one's passions and to kill one's brother!

After having dethroned Jesus, our author is busy with overturning his friends, and, in particular, the apostle whom Jesus loved. M. Renan thinks that St. John was jealous of Peter, and hated Judas (p. 381, etc.).

On the other hand, he almost justifies the judges who condemned the Saviour; "for," says he, "the proceedings which the priests resolved to take against Jesus were quite conformable to the established law" (p. 393), "and from the Jewish point of view Jesus was certainly a blasphemer" (p. 397). Elsewhere M. Renan excuses Pilate, who, says he, "could hardly help doing what he did" (p. 410). Finally, oh gentleness of criticism! we find pity, even almost to tears, for Judas! He is called "poor Judas"! He is found guilty only of "having.

had his head turned by the foolish coveting of a few pieces of silver," and the attempt is made to absolve him on the ground of his repentance: "Judas," we are told, "does not seem quite to have lost all moral sense, since . . . he repented." M. Renan's proof of this is that the guilty man committed suicide! (p. 382). "Perhaps, too," he adds, "the fearful hatred with which he was looked upon may have led to acts of violence in which the hand of God was seen" (p. 438). The meaning of this is that probably Judas was murdered by the Christians! Let it be admitted, then, that a suicide which was not committed cannot prove his repentance. But enough. The multiplication of examples would be irksome: those we have given are sufficient for our purpose.

It must be borne in mind that our aim has not been to analyze M. Renan's book, but simply to judge of what amount of confidence we are warranted to repose in him as our guide in the study of the life of Jesus. At first sight we recognise the author as hostile to his hero, weakening the authority of the Gospels, denying *à priori* Christ's miracles, falsifying texts in order to tarnish his character, praising his adversaries, and at the same time paying him equivocal compli-

ments of little moment, but serving to weaken the blows struck, and to prevent the martyr's friends from crying out.

Every one may now judge for himself whether this guide suits him or not. For ourselves, what we have seen of him is enough, and we prefer to walk alone rather than to give our hand to him who wishes to lead us astray.

THE CHRIST OF THE GOSPELS.

IN beginning the study of the life of Jesus we asked ourselves if we should take M. Renan for our guide : we have seen what amount of confidence his work is entitled to receive.

Whom, then, shall we follow, if we forsake so learned a guide? No one. We will go at once to the source, to the Gospels themselves, for it is there that all commentators are finally constrained to return. We will consult the books written by the immediate disciples of the Lord ; first, to ascertain what were their Master's moral principles, and how he practised them ; and then we will proceed with the examination both of

the precepts and the conduct of Jesus in the matter of truthfulness.

What, then, are the moral principles of Jesus Christ? And first, what are his principles on the subject of veracity? Is man, in this matter, entitled to the use of different weights and measures, according as he lives in the East or in the West? Is he at liberty to regulate himself by the rule of honesty adopted by his race and the age in which he lives? Does Jesus know anything of the theory of Oriental sincerity? Does he admit that the end justifies the means? Will he say, with M. Renan, "There exists no broad foundation which is not laid in legends. The only guilty party is the humanity which desires to be deceived"? Will he allow the concealments and the mental reservations which are sanctioned by that too notorious society which bears too beautiful a name? * In a word, will Jesus authorize divers sorts of truthfulness, divers kinds of convenient affirmations? No. Jesus has but one word for all. His rule is admirably simple; it is a golden rule, a Divine rule, a rule we may challenge all the philosophers to surpass or even to equal: "Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than

* The Jesuits.

these cometh of evil." Noble and impressive maxim, which bears in itself the seal of its Divinity!

But did Jesus obey this precept of perfect integrity? Yes; always and everywhere. Follow him from Jerusalem to Gethsemane, and from Gethsemane to the Sanhedrim, you will find him perfectly calm and truthful. Whether it be necessary to assert his Divine mission or to brave a danger, he does both with the same simplicity. "Who is the Son of God, that I might believe on him?" asks the man born blind. "It is he that talketh with thee," answers Jesus. The soldiers search for him in the garden, that they may take him before the tribunal: he comes to meet them, and says, "I am he." "Art thou the Son of God?" ask the priests who seek to crucify him. "You have said," he replies, "I am." "Art thou a king, then?" asks Pilate. Again Jesus replies, "I am." Neither hope nor fear, neither honour nor shame, can alter his word: it is ever his own, "Yea, yea." If there be one conviction stronger than any other forced upon the reader of the Gospels, it is this: when Jesus speaks he has no after-thought; he speaks the truth, the whole truth. Unbelievers may accuse him of prejudice, of ignorance, of provincialism, but never of falsehood; and when an adversary does so

he rouses against himself a public opinion which is otherwise very indulgent: a striking proof, this, that there exists in the world the firm conviction that Jesus was incapable of knowingly altering truth.

What conclusion are we to draw from this? Not that Jesus was the Son of God, but that he believed himself to be so. Whatever else may be questioned, his sincerity must not be doubted: he said often, and in many ways, I am the Son of God. Let it be confessed that he believed he spoke the truth. Jesus, then, either was the Son of God, or else he was a madman! There is no other alternative. But how are we to reconcile this madness with these calm words, these profound thoughts, these humble sentiments, this pure and holy life? A madman may believe himself to be a God, but can a madman transform a world? Was it possible for a madman to conceive the soundest of moral systems, and specially to live consistently with the principles of this morality? Is it likely that a madman could be so wise as to surpass all mankind in virtue, and that his insanity should only be seen in the name he assumes? No; M. Renan himself has said it: "If the madman walks side by side with the inspired man, it is with this difference, that the madman never succeeds."

If, therefore, the success of a moral enterprise be the test of wisdom, who was ever wise as Jesus Christ ?

Already we may say, Jesus made it a rule to be absolutely truthful ; Jesus was faithful to His precept as M. Renan is to his : and judging them both on this common basis, we may rightfully add, Jesus, in declaring that he was God's only begotten Son, proclaimed a pure and simple truth.

We are not, however, anxious to conclude. We wish, before we do so, to exhibit the moral doctrines of Jesus on some important points, and then to compare his life with the principles he himself laid down. We shall then be better able to judge whether the word of Christ deserves our belief or not.

Among the rules of conduct taught by Jesus upon earth, we seek those which are peculiarly his own. We say nothing, therefore, about honesty in our social relationships, or purity of morals, or almsgiving, or hospitality. These principles, if not practised, at least were known before Jesus came into the world. That which we shall point out as an essentially Christian virtue is *humility*. Surely there is no one else who claims to be the inventor of this ! Neither in ancient nor in modern times has humility been held to be worthy of much atten-

tion, much less worthy of praise. In our natural pride, or, should a less distasteful phrase be preferred, in our human dignity, we have never much appreciated the bliss of self-abasement. Our common tendency is rather to exaggerate our own worth, and to seek our own honour. And we think no one will claim the discovery of humility for any besides Jesus Christ. He alone said to his disciples, "Be humble as this little child. Whosoever will be greatest amongst you, let him be your servant. God exalts the humble, and abases the proud."

This is the first moral principle of Jesus. Did he practise it? In proof that he did, although from the Christian point of view it would be allowable, yet we will not instance his obscure birth, the manger at Bethlehem, the workshop at Nazareth, his death on the cross. No: we might be told in reply that Jesus, a mere man, had no choice either with respect to his cradle or his grave. The proof we give we find in the positions he himself chose. He sits at table with the poorest and the most despised of the people; he washes his disciples' feet; he declares himself meek and lowly in heart; he spends his nights in the mountains without troubling himself to procure a

place where he may lay his head ; he refuses a crown offered to him by the people ; and after having refused a throne, he accepts that cross so ignominious for him, but so blessed for the world. When did Jesus cease to be humble—he, who always called himself Son of man, who called his followers *little ones*, and who pronounced “blessed” the mourners, the peace-makers, the merciful, and the persecuted ?

We insist no longer upon this point, for we do not suppose that any one will refuse to Jesus the glory of a virtue so little coveted ! We are, therefore, content to leave this part of the subject by affirming, that he who first established humility in principle admirably illustrated it in practice. We would, nevertheless, say one thing more. Is not this humility, which no one covets for himself, yet desired in children and servants ? Who would not be glad if his neighbours, his friends, his fellow-citizens, were humble in their relations to himself ? What is the greatest obstacle to peace and order in the world ? Is it not that pride which is more insatiable than hunger and thirst ? And should we not esteem it a great blessing if this pride could be extirpated from the bosom of humanity, without doing damage to our individual claims ? Yea,

doubtless. We approve of humility in a treatise on morals ; we desire it in the family and in society ; we may even, whilst talking about it, profess it for one's self ; but in active life it is quite another thing : in a word, we desire humility for all save in ourselves ; fresh proof, therefore, that Jesus, who not only proclaimed it, but lived it, was superior to our race, puffed up as it is with pride and vanity. We measure the true greatness of Jesus by his voluntary humility.

The last proof of humility afforded by the life of Jesus, viz., his voluntary death, leads us to the second moral principle which distinguishes his teaching : devotedness. He demands of his disciples that they should forsake all in order to follow him ; that they should take up their cross, accept persecutions, and devote themselves, their goods, and their families, to the service of God and of their fellow-creatures. Doubtless this is an admirable principle, and one which all men accept in theory. In practice, however, it is very different. We admire the precept, Serve your brethren ; but we practise the proverb, Every one for himself.

What was the conduct of Jesus in this respect ? Did he act consistently ? We do not now say that he gave his life that our sins might be blotted out, and that he

left heaven to come and teach us ; no, we might be told that we must first prove that he really did come from heaven. No one, though looking upon Jesus as no more than a superior man, will deny his devotedness. If we may credit M. Renan, Jesus was a transcendent genius, and therefore able to win his way to the highest ranks of society, as so many others have done. On the contrary, he devoted himself entirely to the moral education of the people. In order to accomplish this task he accepted the conflict with the great, whom he unmasked ; he incurred their hatred ; he voluntarily submitted to the wrongs they did him, to their attacks and their calumnies. When, by a simple recantation, he might have avoided death, he was the first to say, I cannot do it ! I am the Son of God. Under the lash and nailed to the cross, he never shrunk from the trial of suffering. It is unnecessary to describe his martyrdom, it is sufficiently well known ; but this martyrdom was the most sublime devotedness ! Thus, by choosing an obscure life, mostly spent in the streets, whilst he might have obtained a brilliant career, and have sat in the chair of Moses ; by accepting death upon the scaffold when he could have placed himself under the protection of Pilate ; by living on alms, teach-

ing the people, exposing himself to scorn, having no prospect of worldly compensation either in the present or in the future, leaving behind him the memory of his name only in the recollections of twelve poor men, the ablest of whom could scarcely read or write; surely, in the presence of all these facts, it will not be credited that even the most discerning eye has discovered, in such a life, the secret and selfish motive which tarnishes this sublime self-denial!

We now point out two other moral principles, which, though of less frequent application, are yet not the less striking. Jesus, in his sermon on the mount, had taught the forgiveness of injuries; and when Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times?" the reply Jesus gave him was, "I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven." He also said, "Whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also."

Such is the precept. Did Jesus follow it? Yes; and we venture to add that he went beyond the letter of the precept, and admirably fulfilled it in its spirit. A servant struck him on one cheek: did he turn the other? He did better: without retaliation or

complaint, he instructed the man who thus insulted him by calmly answering, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" What dignity and sweetness is here! What a noble lesson! If ever in the course of our lifetime we have been, like him, the victims of an undeserved and brutal assault, which flushed our cheeks and clenched our fists in resentment, did it occur to us to say, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?" Alas! these are not the words which proceed from our poor humanity under its provocations. In this reply we have the loving spirit, not the dead letter. It is better than forgiveness; it is love, seeking to bring the guilty one to repentance.

On another occasion, Jesus and his apostles came to a certain village, where they were refused admission by the inhabitants. The apostles, angry at this insult, asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven upon the guilty place. With his characteristic gentleness the Master replied, "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Here we have the forgiveness of injuries, without pomp or ostentation.

Lastly, Jesus proclaimed a principle which is as

universally approved as it is rarely practised ; that, namely, of love for our enemies—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which persecute you." The precept is explicit. Did Jesus follow it? We shall judge for ourselves. At Gethsemane he rebukes his disciple who is anxious to avenge him—"Put up again," says he, "thy sword into his place : for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword." At the gate of Jerusalem, he weeps over the fickle people who would not listen to him—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" Though at liberty to defend himself, Jesus remains silent before his enraged foes,—Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod,—who seek to entrap him, who insult and strike him. He might have retaliated, and the more so because he was prepared to die. A mere man would have afforded himself the satisfaction of confounding his unjust judges. No, Jesus keeps silence, and this silence reveals as much the calmness of his spirit as the gentleness of his heart.

An arrest, however, is not an execution ; mockings

do not torture like bearing the cross ; this does not *lacerate* like the nails. What will Jesus do when the soldiers, the priests, and the mob unite to abuse him, to laugh him to scorn, to pierce his hands, and to make him drink the cup of bitterness ? What will he reply to the taunt of the infatuated crowd, the thieves, and the priests : “ If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. He saved others ; himself he cannot save. He trusted in God ; let him deliver him now, if he will have him ” ? Alas ! we confess that had we been in his place, we should have made a last great effort to come down ; and, in our impotence, we should at least have given vent to our fury by throwing back their insults : “ Cowards, who mock a condemned man to whose words you but lately listened with admiration ! hypocrites, who should at this very hour be purifying yourselves, in the Temple, for the Passover, but who prefer to make yourselves impure by witnessing an execution ! worthy sons are ye of your fathers who in all ages have been executioners and murderers ! ” Was it thus Jesus spoke to his enemies ? No ; but addressing God and forgetting himself, he exclaims, “ Father, forgive them ; for they know not what they do ! ” To pray for those who tear your flesh, insult your agony,

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and rail at your devotedness ; to excuse them even because of their ignorance—is not this to love your enemies, to bless them that curse you, and to pray for them that persecute you ?

Such is the saint whom a critic thinks he honours by transforming into his own image ! such is the hero to whom are attributed a “transcendent scorn” and “subtle raillery,” and who is styled “a master of irony !” Is it scorn that sparkles in this appeal : “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ; learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart” ? Is it derision that we find in these words to the apostles : “I call you no more servants, but friends : love one another, as I have loved you” ? Is there any subtle railing in the prayer : “Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name ; Thy kingdom come : Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” ? Ah, if scorn, mockery, and irony are to be found anywhere, it is not in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but in a book which lacks honesty, and dissembles its scorn and its railing under the appearances of respect and admiration ; a book whose false praises sweeten the edges of a cup which is full of bitterness and poison.

How deeply we feel that neither our own pen, nor that of any uninspired man, can ever worthily reproduce the character of Jesus Christ. After having so many times vainly attempted it, we despair of success. Have our readers, for instance, ever met with a head of Christ which has satisfied them? We never have. Artists and writers only give us magnified men. Nature furnishes no model which resembles Jesus. The most perfect of these are still essentially men. Alexander, Cæsar, Napoleon, all have our passions, though we have not their genius. In Socrates and Plato we discover the germs of our weakness, though they are wiser than we. A St. Paul, an Augustine, and a Pascal, leave us far behind on the road to holiness; yet we recognise them, by means of their defects, as members of our poor human family; and even were we disposed to be too indulgent towards them, their own confessions are there to correct us. Thus, always and everywhere, man remains essentially man.

The evangelists alone have made us conceive an ideal which no man, whether in his life or by his pen, has ever reproduced; and if, as we may well suppose, their picture is as far from the reality as we are from

their copy, what must not the living Christ have been ? *

* It would be interesting to compare the style of the evangelists with that of M. Renan. In the former we find simplicity and the complete absence of pretence. We have no epithets, no oratorical displays. We forget the writers. It is their hero we have before us, and, what is remarkable, the historian does not eulogize him, but allows us to form our own estimate from the facts themselves. If we except one or two words of St. John's, the four evangelists have not written a line which reveals any purpose beside that of writing a history. There is no attempt to make the readers proselytes to a cause or a doctrine.

In M. Renan's work all this is reversed. One perceives that the principal thing kept in view is the literary character of the book. The style takes precedence of the facts; elegance is the author's highest ambition. He seems to have imposed upon himself the rule not to write like any other man. All the turns of phrase, all the expressions, aim at the picturesque and the novel. Wit, cleverness, mental reservation, the art of forcing a secret conclusion upon the conclusion which is expressed, and of discrediting the cause which in appearance is defended—such is M. Renan's task. But clever persons sometimes do a work which disappoints them. "The Life of Jesus" has cost its author more moral discredit than all his previous works have obtained for him of literary renown. After eighteen centuries the gospel is being diffused still: after three months M. Renan's book has materially lost in public opinion. M. Scherer who, on the appearance of the work, predicted on its behalf a success so great that it would be felt even by those who never heard of it, three months later is obliged to recognise that it has attracted only the curious, and summarizes the well-founded objections made to it thus:—1. M. Renan has judged a moral work in the spirit of a mere artist. 2. He has

Jesus resembles no other man ; he speaks and acts as none of our kind ever spoke and acted. At first he surprises us, but as we contemplate him, our surprise changes into admiration. The more we examine the more we discover in his words profound thoughts and lofty sentiments which, till then, had never entered our minds or our hearts. In the midst of his superior world and his superhuman atmosphere, Jesus lives and breathes as in his own element. There he moves freely, he speaks without effort ; all is familiar to him—he is at home. Heaven is his country, holiness is his nature, eternity is his life. He does not demonstrate as we mere men are obliged to do, who have no right to be believed on our simple assertions ; he speaks like a God, whose word is law. Nothing embarrasses him ; he speaks of heaven and hell, life and death, the judgment and eternity, as of things he has seen, and which belong to his domain. His constant thought is about the kingdom of God, and he is solely occupied with the will of his Father, and the sanctification of humanity. His feet scarcely touch the earth, his heart is ever in

virtually denied the integrity and the purity of Jesus Christ. 3. He has falsified his character by making of an admirable teacher an unnatural colossus.—*Vide Le Temps, Sept. 29th, 1863.*

heaven. We feel that he is a stranger to the petty affairs of this world; even the functions of a secular judge are beneath him; possibly his hand was never soiled by contact with money. He is simple and humble, but grave. He never utters a jesting word, not even a useless one; nor does he ever speak in order to display his intellectual superiority. And as a last noteworthy feature, Jesus certainly wept; but we do not learn that he ever laughed. Yet, he never forgot his disciples, nor ever lost sight of the most remote generations of sinners that were to come after him. His thoughts, like his love, embrace the universe. Surely, this is the Son of God!

If now we pass from the words to the actions of Jesus, we are filled with the same admiration. It has been asserted that Jesus patronizes the poor and threatens the rich: it would be more truthful to say that he takes no account of either poverty or riches; gold and stubble are of equal value to him. It is the spiritual condition of those who approach him which claims his attention. What he demands is not lofty thoughts or noble sentiments, but a moral condition which is possible to all. He asks for a heart, which, though broken and contrite, yet expects everything at his hands—healing grace,

salvation, and eternal life. When Jesus performs miracles they do not astonish him : he is engaged in his own proper work. We may indeed reject them without examination ; but when we honestly study them we find it to be quite natural that the Son of God should work such miracles ; specially since these miracles have nothing in common with the prodigies of a thaumaturgus, whose aim is to fascinate the eye and to mislead the imagination. The mighty works of Jesus are just what we might expect from a God who created and now sustains us : he gives food, health, life, forgiveness, to all who, in faith, lay their wants before him. Unbeliever, you are surprised, and you do not know what conclusion to draw from these miracles, but you dare not deny them. Be sincere, and confess that there is something in them beyond your apprehension. Believer, you are delighted. These miracles seem to you the natural operations of the Son of God. You learn from them that he gives comfort, healing, and forgiveness. He were not God did he act otherwise. Let but Jesus speak, and your attention is redoubled. His maxims, by penetrating into your spirit, give you light : the more you study them, the more you find them beautiful and brilliant with the light of truth. They are like the

starry heavens, which reveal to your earnest gaze new depths, filled with new lights, of which even the most dim are clear. Moreover, that which removes from you the fear of delusion, is the fact that all these marvels have, as their end and aim, not the satisfaction of your curiosity, but the purification of your heart, the raising of your mind, and the kindling of your devotion. Yes; this is the test by which we prove the pure gold of the character of Jesus Christ. It is not possible to contemplate him without moral gain. The glow of life is communicated from him to us: it pervades our being, it blesses and sanctifies us. Jesus is the spiritual Sun that warms and vivifies our souls. No one but a God can make us thus at once better and happier.

We know that all we have said reposes on the authenticity of the Gospels and on the historic fidelity of their narratives. We also know that M. Renan, who admits in general this authenticity and this fidelity, nevertheless contradicts them in their details. We would observe that the authenticity of the Gospels is not at the mercy of any critic, whatever may be his ability. Christianity proves the purity of its root by the excellence of its fruits. If necessary, we might accept the invalidation of the Gospels and of the miracles of

Jesus ; further still, we might grant that there is no proof of his resurrection, his ascension, and the inspiration of his apostles : let everything else be denied, yet we cannot deny what we see to-day. Three hundred millions of men acknowledge Jesus Christ, and the civilization of Christendom exceeds all others both in its extent and its depth. Pure morals ; a mild legislation ; the raising of woman to her true standard ; the freedom of slaves ; the relief of the sick, the helpless, and the poor ; the brotherhood of nations—these are things before our very eyes, but only to be found in the Christian world. What we ask therefore is this : Do all these things exist without cause ? Do they date from yesterday ? If in searching for their origin we must go back to the first century of our era, shall we find them to have been spontaneous growths ? Is this transformation without parentage ? Did it spring from the previous moral rottenness ? Let the Divine mission of Jesus Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the existence of the miracles, be denied ; will the void, thus made, better explain the immense results of which we are witnesses than do the evangelical histories ? Is Christianity the offspring of a dream ? Did it grow in a night ? Did humanity wake up one morning and find it already

established in the earth? Men are anxious to lessen the causes ; but the smaller these are, the more astounding do the results become. By substituting feeble beginnings for great ones we do not destroy the miracle ; on the contrary, we make it all the greater. To be rational, then, we must admit a Divine intervention ; and this intervention restores to us again the existence of Jesus, his veracity, his miracles, and the whole train of proofs which had been before rejected.

Thus, whatever may be affirmed or denied, actual facts cannot be overturned. The work of Christianity is before us, and the grandeur of its origin is proved both by its nature and its extent. Its sources may be many, but they must be Divine ; for man, in his inability to change his own heart, never could have the power to transform the hearts and lives of twenty generations.

It must be understood that we have not pretended, in this short sketch, to trace the entire life of Jesus Christ. To know that life we must read and study the New Testament. Our aim has been to show that the Jesus of the Gospels is not that of M. Renan. His Jesus is a compound of cunning and fanaticism ; an imaginary being, created for the amusement of novel-

readers. The historic Jesus is quite another being ; pre-eminently sincere, always calm, profound in his teaching, holy in his conduct, devoted both in life and death, and so much above the greatest men of every age, that we may well believe him when he says and says again, " I am the Son of God."