

# THE TALENTS AND FOIBLES OF ERNEST RENAN

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THE keeping of literary centenaries has become a habit for which it is perhaps needless to offer theoretic justification. There is, indeed, no logical ground for choosing the hundredth anniversary of a great man's birth as a special occasion to commemorate once more his achievements and to fix once again his place on the roll of fame. The fitting moment for such revaluation would be better indicated by the later progress of those scientific studies or those literary developments which the great man furthered in his own time, and which—as they reach new stages since his death—demand such rewriting of their history as will assign to each worker of the past his due proportion of credit. A departed man of science may thus be instructively reconsidered as often as some notable discovery of subsequent times has either enhanced or reduced the significance of what he accomplished. The social prophet who moved his own age should be recriticised at times when the value of the lesson he taught has been either strikingly illustrated or disastrously ignored. Even the long established order of precedence among poets must be held subject to constant revision as singers of new power reveal to us vaster melodies, and the imaginative scope of bygone artists is surpassed by the imagery of a later time.

Thus the historical critic was fulfilling his true function when the work of Darwin sent him back upon the previous record of biological scientists, or when the social changes of the late nineteenth century aroused in him a fresh estimate of John Stuart Mill, or when the poetry of Tennyson and Browning provoked him to a re-appraisal of the early Victorians. The true date for such return upon the past is not fixed by the mere efflux of the years. "Our clock," said Carlyle, "strikes when there is a change from hour to hour, but no hammer in the Horologe of Time peals through the universe when there is a change from Era to Era." Yet the arbitrary selection of the hundredth year is not without its practical advantage. The passage of a century may mark an illogical, and yet a most convenient, stopping-place at which men pause to reflect. It is important

for our public as a whole to have some recurring reminder about the great spirits of the past, and in such matters the common man adopts towards logic an attitude decidedly cavalier. For this the "experts" upbraid him in vain, especially when he notices that experts follow their own "system" with such varying success and so many mutual recriminations. After all, the mechanical suggestiveness of the calendar is an historical agent whose help we cannot afford to despise.

Such are the considerations which have led me to call attention just now to the centenary of the birth of Ernest Renan. Sixty years have passed since Christendom was convulsed by the appearance of the "Vie de Jésus," and for very many people that extraordinary book is the only work by which its brilliant author is known. But there is a great deal more to be said about him than is contained in the fierce polemical controversy to which the "Vie de Jésus" gave rise. My purpose in the present article is rather a psychological study of the man than a rearguing of the opinions upon which disputants have long since worn themselves out.

## I.

Another Frenchman, whose name has gone round the world, was born in the same year. In scientific circles 1823 is being kept as the centenary of Louis Pasteur, and to mention this coincidence is to suggest the first point which calls for emphasis about Renan. His name does not, like Pasteur's, mark an epoch. About no great controversy can we say "It was thus before Renan, but different ever since." Wherever he went, others had already been, and most of the things he saw—or thought he saw—others had already described, not so picturesquely, but often more precisely. Perhaps few have known better how to use the brain of intellectual colleagues. From his masters across the Rhine he was a most expert borrower, and the thoughts which seemed dull when expounded in prosaic or crabbed German he could light up with the radiance of French fancy or the sparkle of French style. All the showy advantages which the Celt has over the Teuton when they compete on the public stage were abundantly at Renan's command. But in the realm of historical criticism he extended no intellectual frontiers, in the sense or on the scale in which Pasteur—to use his own words—extended the frontiers of life.

One sees this point implied, perhaps unintentionally, but for that very reason all the more significantly, in the judgment passed upon him by one of his warmest eulogists. That admirable critic, Sainte-Beuve, declared of him that he was "un maître d'un genre

nouveau." But the critic explains this to mean that Renan was remarkable.

par la supériorité et la variété de son coup d'oeil, sa manière neuve d'envisager et de présenter chaque question, et la rare distinction de sa forme.

These are delightful compliments. But they are compliments to talent, rather than to genius. Would it occur to any Frenchman to use of Pasteur that description which Sainte-Beuve uses of Renan, "cette intelligence élevée"? And the restraint is justified. Survey as you will the whole range of this accomplished writer's books, covering so vast an area of speculation, and you will be hard pressed to specify any field in which his work for the first time cancelled any conclusions of the past or prescribed any enquiry for the future.

Yet he moved mightily a multitude of readers whom other men, richer in learning and more accurate in investigation, had not impressed. He had an extraordinary gift for writing, an imaginative subtlety, a vividness and splendour in description, an endowment which—for want of a more precise name—we may call "poetic." One is amazed to learn that he set out to compose his "Vie de Jésus" with no documentary sources at hand except the text of the New Testament and a copy of Josephus! But he was composing under an eastern sky, amid the inscriptions, the monuments, the landscapes of Syria, and—for the kind of book he aimed to produce—such sources were far more important than all else that enters into the *apparatus criticus* of the modern scholar. He realized not only his own special aptitude for doing this sort of work, but also the no less important fact that it had never been done by any writer with the same aptitude before. These are two prime conditions of literary success, and Renan was triumphantly successful.

For neither the author of the "Leben Jesu" nor any other man with just the same cast of mind could ever have written the "Vie de Jésus." The gospel narrative, retold with every supernatural element carefully excised, with all incipient dogma ingeniously explained away by "race, landscape and psychology," and at the same time with the appealing pathos of character and incident preserved in a poet's glowing eloquence,—this enterprise was as exactly fitted to the talents of Renan as it would have been impossible to the talents of Strauss. And let us admit at once that there was in it not only originality, but high and lasting value. Those who have told the evangelical story since have learned that it must be told in the first instance as a human narrative, and Renan—often where he least intended it—has shown how in first humanizing the Figure one is led

to see that the human categories will not suffice. But the appeal of the "Vie de Jésus" was, at the moment, to sceptical children of the Zeitgeist. Many a reader, with an obstinate prejudice against miracle, and at the same time with the Christian sympathies of the spiritual climate in which he had grown up, felt that here was the book for which he had been waiting. And every kind of reader, whether attracted or repelled by its dogmatic negations, was thrilled by its descriptive charm. The lustre that hard tradition had concealed or long familiarity had dimmed was suddenly made to shine. The reader had forgotten Articles and Creeds. But he had come to know men and scenes, distorted perhaps from the historic fact, but real to the imagination. He was made to feel as one who ages ago had mingled with the fisher folk of Nazareth, walked by the margin of the Sea of Galilee, or watched the sun setting on the brow of Olivet.

## II.

In impatience with this sort of success, the *erudit* has often dismissed Renan as "a writer of sensational novels," and at least one eminent critic has been specially exasperated by the "Parisian sentimentality" which he has imported into the story of the Crucifixion. But it would be quite unfair to dismiss his work without recognition of qualities far more solid than these. Renan was a man of vast, though not seldom of loose and inexact, scholarship. His mind was absorbed from an early age in the problems set by the religious history of mankind, and the value of his enormous collection of writings upon the religions of the world has been obscured by the popular interest which a single small volume monopolized. This interest had been in the first instance roused by his revolt against the Christian doctrines in which he had been educated. But it extended to the forms of faith all over the world, and it became his lifelong quest to discover how these had begun, had flourished, had decayed.

An English writer, whose life was nearly coincident in time with that of Renan, may be quoted as an almost perfect parallel. James Anthony Froude had proceeded just about as far in the clerical career, and had abandoned it on very similar grounds. In a striking autobiographic passage of *The Nemesis of Faith* he has presented one side of his reasons in pictorial form. It is the account of a ruined English abbey in a rural district, suggesting the thoughts which such a sight may arouse in a critical mind. That abbey spoke to Froude of the ceaseless cycle in human creeds, and of the inexorable revenges which time can bring about. Christianity once triumphed over the old gods, threw down the temples, defiled the altars, trans-

formed the statuary into images of saints, replaced the gladsome Nature-worship with the discipline and ritual of the cloister. Great Pan was declared to be dead. The Galilean Conqueror had displaced His rivals. But the message of that old ruin was a message of decrepitude in the new faith itself. A few crumbling walls were all that was left of the stately religious house. The enthusiasm of the monks had become an object of pity or of scorn. A burying-place for the dead was our last link with the days when there had stood on that spot a centre of devotion for the living. It is in the villages, rather than in the cities, said Froude, that such an object-lesson reveals itself. There the memorials of the past endure longest, for the *pagani* are still most tenacious of the ancient pieties. The Nature-gods found with them a last asylum from the Christian persecutor, and to-day the Christian symbols have a root in country soil which science has long since disturbed in the abodes of city culture. But even this—he declared—is only a matter of time. For Froude, the new faith seemed to be dying where the old faith had died, in the scenes where that faith had first died, and lingering where it had lingered.

The inference suggested is, indeed, as fundamentally feeble as it is superficially plausible. For the real problem is not how faiths decay, but how from the decay of each another springs to life, and how it is in the end the same ineradicable human necessity that seeks one satisfaction after another. It is idle for the faithless to demonstrate its error till they can give some satisfying account of its persistence.

Yet such is no unfair example of the point of view from which some modern psychologists of religion have examined those phenomena upon which they have to make their scientific report. Renan was amongst these. He too as he passed from cult to cult, through the vestigial traces of worship in Italy, Greece, Asia Minor, might have said with Byron in Athens:

And yet unwearied still my footsteps trod  
O'er the vain shrine of many a vanish'd god.

Probably few have pursued this investigation with a more insatiable curiosity. Few have felt, as Renan felt, the lure of search. He is thus typical of the late nineteenth century, with its passionate inquisitiveness into the nooks and crannies of the human mind, and to the late nineteenth century his name became symbolic. It symbolized a mood whose excess became almost pathological. Among many with a real "thirst to know" it might be said that Renan's thirst was diabetic.

## III.

But, at least in his earlier and greater period, it was not sheer inquisitiveness that impelled him. His later cynicism would have been fatal to his first creative gift, and the good priests of his Breton village had taken care that he should never become wholly a cynic. He often fought against his own temperamental reverence, but never with complete success. Wherever his mind roamed in anthropology, he was haunted by the same saving thought which inspired another:

Children of men! the unseen Power whose eye  
For ever doth accompany mankind,  
Hath look'd on no religion scornfully  
That man did ever find.

That man must still to some new worship press,  
Hath in his eye ever but served to show  
The depth of that consuming restlessness  
Which makes man's greatest woe.

Thus in his old age Renan could write: "I understand what faith is. . . . I feel that my life is always controlled by a faith which I possess no longer." Herein he is separated *toto coelo* from Voltaire, who certainly never knew "what faith is," and whom—one is not surprised to learn—Renan always disliked. The sage of Ferney wrote much about religion, with great wit and no insight. For the religious mind was not among those phenomena of human nature to which anything in his personal experience supplied a clue. Here is one secret of Renan's greater power.

It was his fate to appear polemical, and this attracted some. But what attracted far more was the essentially hospitable character of his mind, the readiness with which he received and assimilated and appreciated intellectual influence from every quarter. Though he abandoned Catholicism, he thus in a very unusual degree retained catholicity. And he did this without an effort. It was the very expression of his temperament. For in truth there never ceased to work in him some very different spiritual impulses, and he could not have been narrow if he had tried. He used to say that in his own nature the Gascon and the Breton were constantly at odds. His ancestry on one side was Royalist, on the other Republican, and it is not too much to add that Renan himself managed to be both. Intellectually he was an aristocrat, alarmed for the risk of culture at the rude hands of democracy, bent upon establishing the rights of the élite to direct the common man for his good, and with the ideals of feudal monarchic Germany far more attractive to him than those

of revolutionary or democratic France. But the old boyhood memories of the sailor folk of Tréguier were there too, and the incipient emotions of human brotherliness that belonged to the priesthood he had forsaken, and sympathy with the men of the barricades in '48 born of the sympathy he had learned for his own kindred in peril on the sea. And though it must have cost him a hard struggle to keep it alive, there was the Frenchman's national spirit not wholly quenched even when a Napoleon was menaced by a Bismarck.

In the little chapel at Tréguier his mother had dedicated him to St. Yves—the father of orphans—and to himself, an orphan at five years old, the story of this dedication came home. He was sixteen years of age when chosen as a most promising boy for a scholarship at the seminary of St. Nicholas du Chardonnet in Paris, and he has told us of the shock of surprise with which he there discovered that knowledge was not limited to the Church. He was shocked no less by the contrast between the Faith as formally observed in the Paris of Louis Philippe and the religious ways of the men whom he had watched mending their nets or broiling their fish on the Breton shore. It was a new world that began to open before him, a world that appealed irresistibly to his precocious spirit of intellectual adventure, but never quite obliterated the first impressions of his heart. By adoption a child of the Renaissance and the Encyclopédie, he was by birth a child of the Middle Age. Fascinated by the ruined temples of the Athenian Acropolis that spoke to him of the glories of pagan art, he would return ever in thought to the fourteenth century Gothic cathedral at the home of his boyhood, in whose cloisters he had caught the whisper and learned the music of the Christian saints. It was in truth by his first intimacy with the latter that he was enabled in no small degree to interpret the former. For he was but reversing the order of that experience so beautifully depicted by Matthew Arnold:

Not as their friend or child I speak,  
 But as on some far northern strand  
 Thinking of his own gods a Greek  
 In wonder and pitiful awe might stand  
 Before some fallen Runic stone,  
 For both were faiths and both are gone.

#### IV.

Though he rivetted the attention of our fathers, his grip has relaxed and his appeal has grown cold for many of us. Men are already asking in some surprise what it was that made the name of Renan so potent thirty years ago. Is it just because the novelty has



worn off, or because much of what he said has so passed into general knowledge that it is hard to understand how original it once was? Miss Julia Wedgwood, in speaking of Coleridge, has reminded us how a certain flatness is sure to succeed the first effervescence of a new draught in literature, and how the literary heretic loses his interest once he has been classed among a later generation of the comparatively orthodox. For, says Miss Wedgwood, "orthodoxy is always uninspiring."

No doubt this has some relevance to the case of Renan. But his work still remains heretical enough to keep up more interest than it receives, and it is by no means just the orthodox who now depreciate him. That he should have been denounced by the Church he deserted, that the language he sometimes permitted himself to use regarding the sacred things and the sacred figures of all Churches should have earned for him a peculiar ecclesiastical detestation, that the vehemence of invective should be proportioned to the power he once wielded and to the danger which once belonged to his propagandism,—all this is easy to understand. But Renan to-day is not distinguished by being made the mark of special abuse. The Christian apologists feel that even in his own time their Faith had foes far more formidable. Rather has the chilling atmosphere of neglect descended upon him,—a neglect not redeemed by the erection of a statue in his native town, or by the decision of the French Admiralty to call a new Dreadnought by his name.

It is the present-day historians who have snubbed his memory,—not indeed all of them, but some of those with the best right to speak. In calling him a man of talent, but not a man of genius, one must not be unmindful of the judgment passed by so eminent an authority as Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, that "In an historical age Renan was a prince among historians." So, it may be said, was Carlyle. The surpassing merits of the "Vie de Jésus" or of "Marc-Aurèle" suffer no disparagement when we compare those books with "The French Revolution" or with "Cromwell's Letters." But to the historian who is strict to mark historical iniquity there are similar blemishes in each, blemishes which can never destroy the literary charm, but which warn the reader to seek other guides for the strict truth. And, after all, it is the reliable record that is everlasting, while literary charmers—like other charmers—are rewarded with a somewhat fickle allegiance.

Both Carlyle and Renan give us too much that is questionable interpreting, mixed with the veracious record. They have too many morals to draw, too many general reflections about the character of "the Age," too copious a resourcefulness in imaginative con-



struction by which the *lacunae* between facts may be filled in. And although historians should have imagination, they may be too imaginative. They may affect too penetrating an insight into "hidden motives." They can become—in a word—too sure of themselves in regions where we feel that no man has a right to be sure. Renan and Carlyle alike believed themselves to be diviners, in a degree that suggests the lost apostolic gift called "discerning of spirits," and the spirits which they discerned were too remote in time to give even apostles a chance. As a shrewd critic has remarked, we have found it so difficult to be certain about the moods of the man next door, that we simply become cold unbelievers when a gifted historian pretends to lay bare the inmost heart of Tiglath-Pileser. And, write he about her never so vividly, we know that Renan had no personal acquaintance with St. Mary Magdalene.

One recalls how Signor Benedetto Croce, in revolt against this sort of thing, has warned us that even the arid philologist supplies a corrective to the poetical historian, and somewhat rashly declares that it is no function of history to evaluate the past. The mere chronicler can never rival in interest these bold builders of a castle in the air. But it is a great thing to make chronicles accurate. Hence the disgust with which so many readers now turn away from Renan as having "just drawn on his imagination." They feel that a writer with more pedestrian Muse might have told them more truth. And every man must thus suffer from the defects of his qualities.

He has lost power, too, through an increasing dislike to what is called his "dilettanteism." Etymologically this word means a habit of pursuit which has no ulterior end, but is maintained for its own delight. Renan would have gloried in so describing his own intellectual activities. He extolled sheer curiosity as the highest power of human nature. He declared that Paradise itself must grow tiresome unless one can make trips of observation from planet to planet. He calculated that five hundred years would be required to complete his Semitic studies as he had planned them, and thought he might take up Chinese if his interest in Semitics should not last so long. "Abuse the world as you will," he once exclaimed: "at least it will always remain the strangest and most absorbing of spectacles."

There is a noble side to this, and an age of utilitarianism may well learn its lesson. As Professor Babbitt has acutely pointed out, it is to the opposite error that most of us are liable, and "the very excess of Renan may serve as a corrective of what is correspondingly deficient in ourselves." But there is also in it a touch of intellectual Sybaritism, and the brilliant Frenchman has been called with apt-

ness "an intellectual voluptuary." Such an attitude of mind seems to lack seriousness. There is a very wholesome conviction that he who approaches the vast problems of mankind merely to pry into them, as if they were a Chinese puzzle, is not helped but rather disqualified in the search by this inhuman disinterestedness. The pragmatists, for example, have been teaching us that such a mind is leaving out one of the most important data of the enquiry. Wordsworth's scientist, who would peep and botanize upon his mother's grave, may become a good authority upon plant life, but not a good interpreter of the psychological aspects of his mother. The earlier Renan knew this well, but the later Renan often forgot it. One discerns with regret in the work of his old age that intellectual hospitality was fast degenerating into moral indifference. A time came when in conduct as in creed he dared stamp nothing false, for he found nothing sure.

This was the mood of his later years in which he declared that beauty is preferable to virtue, that his old faith in science had declined into a mere temperamental taste, that—for aught he knew—the world may be a gigantic farce put together by "a jovial Demiurge," and that the Temperance Societies are making themselves a cruel nuisance when they interfere with the gay drunkenness of the French workman—so long as intoxication has only "gentle and amiable" accompaniments. It was the mood in which he found *Ecclesiastes* a kindly and amusing book, that should impart to the reader its own serene cheerfulness, at least to readers who know that—though all is vanity—yet many a vain thing should be thoroughly enjoyed. It was the mood which made him reply to almost every sort of conversational remark "Vous avez raison, Monsieur," while an ironic gleam shone in his eye and a glow of dialectic festivity spread over his features. It was the mood in which he wrote no more books like "L'Avenir de la science," but tried his hand at Rabelaisian dramas like "L'Abbesse de Jouarre," to the immense delight of a Parisian audience which lionised him in his old age. Can we wonder at the fierce outburst of Matthew Arnold against the spectacle of a venerable *savant* who can watch with amused indulgence "the worship of the great goddess Lubricity"?

The love of paradox, and the declaration that every sensible man should contradict himself at least once each day, are suggestive of our own George Bernard Shaw, and we must not forget the Shavian surprise that such *jeux d'esprit* should be taken seriously. Perhaps Renan would have been surprised too. It was indeed a fitting choice that entrusted to Anatole France the duty of unveiling his memorial, for the tribute was thus paid to the greatest master of

French prose of a generation ago by the greatest master of the same art to-day, and the spirit of one who "tenderly despised mankind" was the same in both. One seems to hear again the voice of the author of "Caliban" in him who has bidden us recognise that this world is the tragedy of a most excellent poet, that the rôle of everyone called "good" or "bad" is of equal importance to the *denouement*, and that the only fool is he who fancies that things can be improved.

Long before his intellectual doubts had become prohibitive, his early teachers detected that he had no vocation for the priesthood, and one can understand why. Young Renan was quite a "believer," and liked to dream in the afternoon amid the shadows of the cathedral. But somehow "he came late to Mass." And throughout life he was always more or less late for the more arduous spiritual duties. It is perhaps too harsh to say of him that he was something of a *poseur*, but he did rather like a gallery, and it can hardly be an accident that he speaks in his "Souvenirs" of the epoch-making revelation in his boyhood that there is such a goal as "fame." To seek celebrity for one's spiritual strivings is very French, and very un-English. Renan could strike the attitude of a hero, and heroic words at least never failed him. He could write to the Minister of Public Instruction, in the tone of the apostle to Simon Magus, *pecunia tua tecum pereat*. He could declare of himself that his great characteristic is given in the words *veritatem dilexi*. But there is an unpleasant suggestion in the "Souvenirs" that he used to school himself for the worst martyrdom that might befall in sure reliance upon the savings of his sister Henrietta. It was she who had to take for him the crucial decision of his career. When he contemplated matrimony, it was she who had to provide for the upkeep of both himself and his wife. When she died, toiling as an amanuensis at his manuscripts, he dedicated a book to her memory, with a dedication in his own faultless French, and he later produced a delightful little monograph, *Ma Soeur Henriette*. But one has a feeling that he relied on her too much for things he should have done for himself. And one is reminded of Mr. Bernard Shaw's frank confession about his own youth: "I did not throw myself into the struggle of life. I threw my mother into it."

## V.

Criticisms of Renan have been separated wide as the poles, and he who tries to take the reasonable middle course is exposing himself to fire from both extremes. In 1872 M. Paul Sabatier was present in the cathedral of Besançon when a preacher explained the

carnage of the Franco-Prussian war as God's judgment upon France for the publication of the "Vie de Jésus." On the other hand, after the author's death in 1892, an English clergyman of considerable note declared in a memorial sermon that "Ernest Renan was not far from the kingdom of heaven." On what idea of celestial justice the first critic based his explanation, and by what sort of measuring-rod the second estimated the celestial distances, I am unable to say. But the kindlier opinion is one which it is not difficult either to attack or to defend, for Renan's career was full of change. Few of his critics have detected so accurately, and none has analyzed with such piercing effectiveness the significance of this oscillation, as it was detected and analyzed by himself. He realized the failure of his own nerve and the impoverishment of his earlier fibre. And the introspective spectacle set to him his final problem in religious interpretation. Not to many has it been given to be their own moral pathologists as this was given to Renan.

Such virtue as he retained was kept alive, he said, through the direction given to his life by a faith which he had long lost. He compared himself to an animal whose brain has been taken out on the laboratory table, and which nevertheless continues to move as before through sheer force of habit. The ways of acting would survive those ways of thinking to which they were logically related, but they would survive only for a time. The merely instinctive movements would grow weaker. Not indefinitely could men live "on the shadow of a shadow." What would be the moral fate of the next generation, the generation that succeeded those whose intellectual experience had been like his own?

Mais, la foi disparue, la morale reste; pendant long temps mon programme fut d'abandonner le moins possible du christianisme et d'en garder tout ce qui peut se pratiquer sans la foi au surnaturel. Je fis en quelque sorte le tirage des vertus du sulpicien, laissant celles qui tiennent à une croyance positive, retenant celles qu'un philosophe peut approuver. Telle est la force de l'habitude. . . . . La poule à qui l'on a arraché le cerveau continue néanmoins, sous l'action de certains excitants, à se gratter le nez.

Herein lies, for our age, the real problem of Ernest Renan, a problem in comparison with which all meticulous discussion about the features of his style and all learned argument about the fine points of his Semitic scholarship are without interest for this centenary year. As M. de Séailles has admirably said, his intellectual life was an experiment made for the benefit of us all. "He expired in peace, and in absolute negation" say those who compiled and published in his memory the "Livre d'Or." Yet among the last

sentences Renan wrote was a warning against denial of "the Heavenly Father," and an assurance that he had himself known occasions when God was the only intimate friend, the only comforter. These haltings of mind may be mocked as inconsistency, but not by those who have risen above them—rather by those who have sunk beneath them, not by those who have seen beyond Renan's difficulties, but rather by those who have never seen his difficulties at all. There was something uncanny about the way in which during his closing years he studied himself as a physician might take note of his own physical decline, examining the symptoms in utter faithfulness to that science of which he was at once the exponent and the material.

How far can the moral attitudes of Christianity remain when the beliefs with which they were first associated have disappeared? The question is not how far they *do* remain in this or that shallow individual, but how far they can reasonably remain in persons mentally awake and unafraid. A hard question, except for those who airily dispose of it without having felt its sting, or for those who think to have answered it when they have never even properly put it to themselves. There was a time when Renan thought that the Christian moral attitudes might thus remain in isolation indefinitely. But he learned that this could not be, and that he must go either backward or forward. Sometimes he tried going forward, and horrified his admirers by turning out books worthy of a place among the "racy" literature of a Paris kiosk. Later, he felt that he must go backward, and began to talk again the language of devotion, so that his friends wondered whether his brain was giving way. Poor, simple friends! That brain was beyond their clouded scrutiny, and had no need of their feeble apologies.

To dwell upon a man's shortcomings is indeed an ungracious task at a centenary, a task which the critic might well forego when he has to deal with the lesser men. But to the memory of the great master of French thought and expression in the later nineteenth century such telling of the truth is but the discharge of a debt. While about most of those who have passed away it is fitting to remember that their littleness is now no concern of mankind, this rule should never be applied to those "whose footsteps echo ever through the corridors of Time." And in a sense Renan's footsteps do thus echo. When one has made all the deductions—inserted all the qualifications—by which later criticism has to reduce the glow of contemporary panegyric, there remains a brilliance that can never fade from his name. There have been many greater scholars, and there have been many greater artists. But seldom indeed have the gifts of both been so marvellously combined in a single writer.

Seldom has such indefatigable industry been mated in fertile union with such inventiveness, or such width of learning with such grace of speech, or such penetrating interest in the issues of one's own time with such intimate realization of ages long past and cultures far apart. Renan would, no doubt, have desired to be remembered for that fundamental change which he believed himself to have made in the intellectual processes of Europe, and the distinction of an intellectual Reformer on such a scale is one which history must deny him. He declared that the greatest book of the century would be on "Christian Origins," and he gave that title to his own work, but it was by no means the greatest of the century. Yet the intellectual inspiration of his personality is an inspiration that must abide. For generations still to come it is to the far-shining figure of Renan that his countrymen will look back as typical of what is finest in French letters,—the insatiable thirst to know, the broad charity to understand, the flexible readiness to appreciate, the transparent honesty of self-disclosure, the verbal resource of perfect expression by which language fits itself to thought "without crease or wrinkle" and in which the French *litterateur* still stands peerless in Europe.