

ECCE HOMO

FIRST PART

CHAPTER I

THE BAPTIST

THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH sprang from a movement which was not begun by Christ. When he appeared upon the scene the first wave of this movement had already passed over the surface of the Jewish nation. He found their hearts recently stirred by thoughts and hopes which prepared them to listen to his words. It is indeed true that not Judæa only but the whole Roman Empire was in a condition singularly favourable to the reception of a doctrine and an organisation such as that of the Christian Church. The drama of ancient society had been played out; the ancient city life, with the traditions and morality belonging to it, was obsolete; a vast empire, built upon the ruins of so many nationalities and upon the disgrace of so many national gods, demanded new usages and new objects of worship; a vast peace, where war between neighbouring cities had been the accustomed condition of life and the only recognised teacher of virtue, called for a new morality. There was a clear stage, as it afterwards appeared, for a Universal Church. But Palestine was not only ready to receive such an innovation, but prepared, even before the predestined Founder appeared, to make more or less abortive essays towards it. At the moment of his almost unobserved entrance, the whole nation were intent upon the career of one who was attempting in an imperfect manner that which Christ afterwards fully accomplished.

It was the glory of John the Baptist to have success-