

SOCIETY IN ROME UNDER THE CÆSARS.*

M. Renan likes this portion of Israelite history, partly that the sojourn in Israel, for example, left traces on their national character and institutions, partly that it is, in some measure, corroborated by contemporary records and monuments. Indeed he traces various religious institutions which were held most sacred by the chosen people not to any divine appointment but to Egyptian influence. A good deal, however, of what he writes on the subject of Egypt may be read with interest and advantage.

"All is doubtful," says M. Renan, "in these remote times, for which Israel has only legends and misapprehensions." One thing is certain: Israel came into Egypt under a dynasty favourable to the Semites, and left it under one which was hostile. This is exactly what the Old Testament tells us; and if it speaks the truth on this point, why should it be untrustworthy on others of the same kind? M. Renan even records something which sounds like a passage of the Red Sea; but he reassures his readers by explaining that at certain places it was possible to cross without even wetting one's feet; at the same time the sea was so capricious that any one attempting to cross might be overtaken by the waves and drowned; so that ample provision is made for the escape of Moses and the Israelites, and for the destruction of Pharaoh and his host! Let the reader turn to Milman's account in his *History of the Jews*, and he will learn the difference between an historian and a novelist. M. Renan relates with great gravity and with quite an air of historical solemnity, a number of the incidents connected with the life of the Israelites in the desert. Events enshrined in their poetry, their faith, their worship, most probably had some actual historical being; moreover, many of them are picturesque; and the good M. Renan will not spoil his story, which, after all, is a very pretty one, by omitting all these charming legends, which, if they are not literally true, yet do illustrate the history of this interesting people; and so we go in "with a hop, skip, and a jump," with airy unconscious levity, (*leviter et audacter*), as Harnack unkindly says of this brisk and brilliant Frenchman, and we are so much amused that we can hardly feel it in our hearts to be angry.

When we come to Sinai, we are, of course, conducted into the realms of mythology. Here the supernatural meets us face to face, and the supernatural M. Renan cannot away with. "This God of Sinai," says our airy expositor, "was in any case formidable, and could not be disturbed in his retreat with impunity. If you met him in the passes of his mountains, he endeavoured to kill you." What stuff is this! There is no hint that the God who met Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness, was regarded as a local deity. But M. Renan goes on quite cheerfully: "Such appears at least to be the explanation of the strange episode of which we must be content to give a translation, for the true sense of it escapes altogether." And then he gives the account of the mysterious encounter recorded in Exodus iv. 24-26. After this introduction we are quite prepared to hear Sinai spoken of as the "Olympus of Israel, the point of departure of the great luminous 'apparitions' of Jahveh."

In the same manner every incident is treated. Thus, in speaking of the well at Beer, mentioned in Numbers xxi. 15, he remarks: "At Beer, the discovery of a spring, by means of the divining rod, produced the following song, which we must suppose to have been sung in chorus;" and then he quotes the lines, "Spring up, O well, etc;" and adds: "This song was subsequently the origin of miraculous stories. It is pretended, in fact, that Moses made the water come out of the rock by striking it with his rod." Here we have the true rationalistic spirit exemplified. There is not the slightest connection between the rock in Horeb and the well. It is not stated or implied that the discovery of the well was miraculous. But M. Renan must show his ingenuity, which, after all, is here not very considerable. How much prettier it would be to follow the mythical method, as indeed has already been done. But alas, that too has failed; and so M. Renan is doing for the history of Israel what he attempted with the history of Christ. He is sewing together a coat of many colours, made of patches drawn from the rationalistic and mythical store-bags, and drawing them out somewhat indiscriminately.

M. Renan follows the history very much as it is given in the Pentateuch. He tells the story of Balaam, he gives a good account of the country to the East of Jordan (p. 222 sd.), of Jerusalem (p. 240 ss.). When he comes back to theology, and tries to give an account of the growth of religious opinion in Egypt (*développement du Jahvéisme matérialiste*), he becomes absurd again. Of one thing only are we sure, that, whenever an incident is rendered which would throw any light upon the development of Divine Revelation, M. Renan finds that it is of little consequence, or legendary, or obscure; but whenever he meets with any material which is susceptible of artistic treatment, he sets to work *con amore* and gives us a delicious idyl. In this connexion we might refer to the charming, if also provoking chapter on the Song of Deborah.

But it is useless to go further. M. Renan's book may charm some students of the graceful language which he employs with so much skill; it may please some of those who are determined to find nothing supernatural in human history; but it will hardly disturb the faith of the weakest Christian, and it will do nothing to advance the cause of Biblical science.

MANNERS among the more refined and cultivated nations alter to a certain extent like fashions, only their variations are not so sudden and ephemeral as those of the latter, and of course the changes can only be slight deviations from the main lines of civility and courtesy, from men to women first, and then from all to all. The modes of expression may be different, but the principle remains always the same, and the edifice of good manners stands on its original foundation, though the ancient walls may be a good deal obscured by modern growths which have sprung up round them.

THIS essay obtained the Hare Prize at Cambridge in 1886, and is now republished with a few alterations and corrections. The subject assigned by the examiners was "The Social life of Rome in the First Century, A.D." "Thanks," says Mr. Inge, "to the labours of scholars and archaeologists in Germany and elsewhere, we can picture to ourselves many scenes of Roman life with as much clearness and accuracy as those which we see around us. The dress which the Roman citizen wore, the structure and furniture of the house in which he lived, the library in which he studied, the banquets in which he shared have been described with a minuteness which leaves little to be added. With equal accuracy and exhaustiveness, the names and functions of the various slaves, the ceremonies attending marriages and funerals, the position of the various buildings of public resort at Rome, have been discussed and determined till there seems little left for ingenuity to effect in the work of reconstruction, except by compelling the earth to yield up more of the treasures which she still hides beneath her surface." Perhaps Mr. Inge felt himself fettered by certain limitations imposed by the competition. His work is scholarly, comprehensive and accurate. What it lacks—colour, glow, atmosphere—is owing, no doubt, to the conditions under which it was written; but in a new edition these defects might have been, to a great extent, supplied. Yet within the limits of a moderate sized volume he gives a very concise and interesting account of the religion, philosophy and morality of the Romans under the Cæsars—how they were governed, their daily life, their amusements, and the unexampled luxury in which the wealthy classes indulged. The old religion of the Roman people, which "found its noblest expression in patriotism," had declined and become discredited in the last century of the Republic, and it was, in the first century of the Empire, openly scoffed at by the educated and enlightened, though upon the lower classes it still maintained a considerable hold. "In most cases the simple faith of former days was as completely obsolete as the fare of the citizen-farmer. The belief in immortality was openly ridiculed. In Cicero's time hardly an old woman . . . could be found who trembled at the fables about the infernal regions." Even boys, according to Juvenal, disbelieved in the world of spirits. "The existence of the gods was commonly treated as an open question, and one not of great importance. The rites of religion were either neglected or performed in a perfunctory and contemptuous manner. . . . The old religion, as a moral force, seemed quite spent and gone." But as the writings of Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, and many others would not be considered to fairly express the religious beliefs of the great mass of English-speaking people, so the statements of Roman writers whose works have come down to us must not be taken unreservedly. "The leading writers of any age," says Mr. Inge, "are seldom the honest exponents of the beliefs of the masses. The attacks of free thought and materialism seldom reach the uneducated. . . . There are many indications that upon the lower classes at least religion still had a considerable hold." If, however, scepticism prevailed among the educated classes, superstition still maintained a strong hold on their minds and imaginations. If Cato wondered how one augur could meet another without smiling, "the most absurd and childish superstitions are recorded of men of strong sense and practical ability." Under these circumstances it was not remarkable that "men turned to Stoicism and Epicureanism to supply them with a rule of life which they could not find in the worship of the gods." The influence of philosophy on thought and conduct and on public opinion was shown in many ways, and especially in the more humane treatment of slaves. Christianity too, though at first its consolations were sought by "the slaves, the poor, the unprivileged, the expatriated," gradually carried its teachings into the libraries of the learned, and exerted a potent if unrecognized influence in many ways, and is very noticeable in some of the literature of the period. "The gentleness which tempers the stoicism of Seneca, the almost feminine sweetness of Epictetus, the affection and resignation of Quintilian under domestic bereavement, the complaints of Juvenal of the spread of Jewish and Oriental superstitions, the edicts banishing Jews from Rome, are signs of various kinds which might escape our notice if we had not later events to help us. With those events we need not hesitate to ascribe them to that influence which . . . was at last to overthrow the temples of the Pagan gods and establish Christianity as the religion of the Empire."

"The Romans of the Republic prided themselves greatly on their honesty and truthfulness," but honesty and truthfulness had become things of the past long before the Empire was established. "Passionate love for money had overcome all respect for right and justice." Crimes committed for the sake of profit were of frequent occurrence, and legacy-hunting was the most lucrative profession. Boodlers were not unknown, but not much is heard "of dishonest contract work or fraudulent adulterations, . . . and credit seems to have been fairly good."

Humanity was not a Roman virtue, but in the period under consideration the condition of the slave was greatly improved and in many respects was even better than that of the negro in the Southern States before the Civil war. Slaves had opportunities under the Empire not only to better their condition but to acquire their freedom and attain eminence in some of the professions. Slaves held public offices in the State and discharged duties committed in our time to Cabinet Ministers, secretaries, and chiefs of departments. Field labourers had doubtless a hard life, but domestic slaves, those who served in the household were treated fairly well and their condition was not by any means intolerable.

*Society in Rome under the Cæsars. By William Ralph Inge, M.A., Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, and Assistant Master at Eton. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.