

THE NEO-CHRISTIAN MOVEMENT IN FRANCE.

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IN the masterly study which he has just published on the religious state of France, M. Taine arrives at the following conclusions: during the past few years there has been a renewal of zeal and activity in the clergy, in the religious congregations, and in the flock of the faithful; the ascendancy of the Catholic faith has increased within these limited groups, while it has diminished in the popular masses of the towns and of the rural districts, which, by an insensible and slow reaction, are in course of becoming once more pagan.

The conclusions of the eminent historian may be accepted as being temporarily exact, so far as concerns the bulk of the French nation; but they leave out of the question the intellectual *élite* of the young generations, the nucleus of high culture wherein the directing ideas of the future are being elaborated—the writers, the professors, the students, the cultivated people in general who take an interest in philosophical speculations. This intellectual *élite* is at present passing through a very curious crisis of thought, the symptoms of which are not easy to discern. Let us endeavor to resume them, with the aid of some of the books that throw light upon the workings of the contemporary conscience. For the past year this subject of investigation has been on the order of the day in the newspapers and reviews; and hardly a week passes without bringing some new publications wherein young philosophers make an examination of their ideas. A writer already of repute, M. Édouard Rod, has recently presented to us a general exposition entitled "The Moral Ideas of the Present Time" (*Les Idées morales du Temps présent*), wherein he studies a state of mind which another writer, M. Lasserre, calls "The Christian Crisis" (*La Crise chrétienne*), and which a third writer, M. Pouilhan, names "The New Mysticism" (*Le nouveau Mysticisme*). All these authors are agreed in affirming that a period has just closed with the decline of the principal influences which French thought used to obey, and that a new period is beginning under the empire of other influences that are still confused. Before ascertaining in what this meta-

morphosis consists, let us first of all call to mind what the French freethinker was during the preceding phase.

In the first half of this century the French freethinker was, above all things, Voltairian. He had added scarcely anything to the ironical negations of the eighteenth century. For that matter, religious incredulity in the freethinker was merely one of the aspects of the revolutionary instinct, and formed part of his political opinions; he pursued with the same hatred God, kings, and priests, because these words symbolized the abhorred vestiges of the Old Régime. The philosophy of the French middle classes of those days finds its most exact expression in the songs of Béranger and in the poems of the old age of Victor Hugo. Mockery had been the arm most successfully employed by the philosophers of the eighteenth century in demolishing faith, and there remained in consequence a tendency to ridicule all who seriously accepted religious practices. How strong is the sentiment of ridicule in France is well known. Human respect, in the sense which the catechism gives to this expression, is a purely French weakness. The firmest believers required, then, considerable courage to manifest their convictions by outward signs and to brave the smiles of the indifferent.

After 1848, at the close of a brief awakening of religious idealism, the simultaneous progress of all the sciences increased unbelief, but modified its nature in cultivated persons. At that epoch the scientific spirit monopolized the prime forces of thought, and took the place of the literary spirit; by a necessary consequence, the negation of religious ideas ceased to be a rhetorical exercise, and assumed an eminently scientific and much more serious character. The discoveries of the physical sciences caused the triumph of a purely mechanical conception of the universe; the new impetus of the historical and philological sciences seemed to ruin forever the authority of legends and ancient texts. The results of German criticism penetrated into France, and completed the destructive work of the eighteenth century by changing the method of attack. M. Renan adapted this new

arm to the requirements of our national mind, and vulgarized it by ridding it of the heavy apparatus of German erudition. In one of M. Renan's books, published recently, but written in the days of his youth, "The Future of Science" (*L'Avenir de la Science*), we are enabled to grasp the new and very sincere faith which served the most distinguished men of his generation in lieu of religion—the faith in science as being susceptible of indefinite progress, capable of satisfying the intelligence by expounding the universe to it, and of alone procuring the happiness of men by satisfying all their material and moral needs. This faith animated those who were about to become the masters of French thought, M. Littré and M. Taine; it was corroborated by influences from outside, and especially from England, with the works of Spencer and of Stuart Mill, and with the theories of Darwin, to which France gave extreme conclusions that the English philosopher had not allowed himself to entertain. The famous book of Draper, *The Conflicts of Science and of Religion*, would resume exactly enough the state of mind of intellectual circles at the end of the second empire and the beginning of the third republic.

The doctrines of some mighty masters and their scientific faith had slowly sunk into the average intellects, in the university, in the influential press, and in all the centres of ideas. In proportion as they reached lower intellectual strata, these doctrines lost the studious serenity which they had maintained on the heights, and at the same time they combined with the still vigorous tradition of Voltairianism, and with the spirit of opposition to the clerical empire, and later to the monarchical assemblies which essayed to restore the throne and the altar. When the men who had been brought up in this current of thought arrived in power, about 1880, they neglected nothing in order to realize in the republic the ideal of their youth; they imposed the heaviest sacrifices upon the state for the purposes of popular education, with the conviction that they were at last going to annihilate Christianity, and convert the whole nation to the new religion of science. Indeed, it may be said that within the past six years science has become the official religion of the French government. The adversaries of this government have refused to

see in its policy anything but a system of absurd vexations; this, however, is a too depreciatory view to take of an effort which originated in serious convictions, at any rate amongst the adepts of the new faith; history will doubtless assimilate their vain attempt to that of the Emperor Julian, the honest and blind philosopher who tried to check the development of Christianity.

Thus, in the years that have elapsed since 1880, the religious sentiment seemed to have received a mortal stroke. Outside of the group of militant Catholics, and they were in a very small minority in the professions wherein is formed the thought that directs the public mind, everything seemed to have conspired against this sentiment—the official action of the legal power, the old Voltairianism of the middle classes, the scientific disdain of the studios, the coarse naturalism of the literary men. We might well have supposed that the generation which was submitted to this decisive test would be definitely emancipated from all religious preoccupation. It is precisely the contrary which has come to pass.

While all the conscious forces of the intelligence were working to destroy the religious want in young souls, historical circumstances were conspiring in the opposite direction, and unconsciously preparing those souls for an irrisistible renaissance of the eternal want.

The French children who were born just before 1870 grew up in an atmosphere of patriotic mourning and amidst the discouragement of defeat. National life, such as it became reconstituted after that terrible shock, revealed to them on all sides nothing but abortive hopes, paltry struggles of interest, and a society without any other hierarchy but that of money, and without other principle or ideal than the pursuit of material enjoyment. Literature, which is the dominant passion in most young minds when college days are over, reflected those same tendencies; it was dejected or vile, and distressed the heart by its artistic dryness, or disgusted it by its trivial realism. Science itself, that science which for a quarter of a century had been the principal nourishment of free minds, and the only lofty aspiration of the new governing classes, began to appear to many what it is in reality, namely, a means and not an end; its prestige declined, and its in-

fallibility was questioned. Then there happened, what always happens at all epochs of great expansion of knowledge: at the first moment this irradiation of light seems to brighten the whole horizon, and man believes himself to be freed forever from the gloom wherein he was feeling his way darkly; but soon the impatient spirits spring further forward, beyond the luminous zone; the magnified horizon retires before their eyes, and the gloom grows there once more, thicker than ever. Above all, it was clear from too evident social symptoms that if science can satisfy some very distinguished minds, it can do nothing to moralize and discipline societies; criminal statistics loudly proclaimed this inefficacy.

Finally it was perceived that scientific criticism, conducted with all liberty and sincerity, had insensibly produced effects very different from those which its official protectors expected. It had acted like a too powerful mine, which blows up the miner's rampart at the same time as the enemy's columns. For a hundred years after the destruction of the religious and political dogmas of the past, France had lived as best she could on some few fragile dogmas, which had in their turn been consecrated by a naïve superstition; these dogmas were the principles of 1789—the almightiness of reason, the efficacy of absolute liberty, the sovereignty of the people—in a word, the whole *credo* of the Revolution. In truth, the champions of the past had not ceased to attack the principles that took the place of their own; but these old-fashioned attacks merely fortified the faith of the people in the new gospel. In order to shake that faith, it was necessary that human reason, proclaimed infallible, should turn its arms against itself; the fortress would have to be dismantled by those whose mission it was to defend it. And that is what happened. Scientific criticism, after having ruined old dogmatism, finally took it into its head that it was its business to verify afresh, and when once started upon this path, it made as short work of the Revolutionary legend as of the monarchical one, and showed itself as pitiless for the rights of man as it had been for the rights of God. The restrictions of theologians as to the liberty and the native goodness of the human creature have been confirmed and soon surpassed by the decisions of independent science. M. Taine was the

first to take charge of the grand liquidation. This redoubtable thinking machine was sufficient to pulverize the whole frail edifice that had been laboriously built up within a century; and as this man, this thinking machine, M. Taine, is venerable by reason of his austere love of truth, as his honest and mighty genius is justly the pride of our race and of our time, his action upon contemporary intellects has had incalculable effects. The breach which he opened has been widened by many others. At the present time, for independent and reflective minds, the new dogmatism is still more difficult to accept than the old; and this latter destruction having made a clean sweep of all certain notions, these minds have sunk into absolute emptiness.

All these causes combined sufficiently explain the nihilism and pessimism which invaded the souls of the young during the past ten years. At the very moment when the politicians, after having shaped society to their mind, were celebrating the definite emancipation of man by science and the conquests of the Revolution, all the philosophical and literary productions of the young generations manifested gloomy despair. They replied to the official apotheoses by a unanimous confession of impotence, scepticism, and premature lassitude. Clear-sighted boys analyzed life with vigor and a precision unknown to their predecessors; having analyzed it, they found it bad; they turned away from life with fear and horror. We are now witnessing this singular phenomenon: while our material civilization is multiplying its prodigies, and placing at the disposal of man all the forces of nature, while that civilization is increasing tenfold the intensity of life in a society where life offers enjoyments only to the leisured and cultured classes, behold we hear sounding on the peaks of intelligence a great cry of discouragement: "Beware of deceitful nature, fear life, emancipate yourself from life!"

This cry was uttered first by the masters of contemporary thought, a Schopenhauer, a Taine, a Tolstoi; below them thousands of humbler voices repeat it in chorus. According to each one's turn of mind, the new philosophy assumed shades different in appearance—Buddhist nirvana, atheistic nihilism, mystic asceticism; but all these theories proceed from the same sentiment, and all these doctrines

may be reduced to the same formula. "Let us depreciate life, let us escape from its snares." Rationalists, sceptics, atheists, the minds that are most emancipated from religious beliefs, return by a different route to the state of thought of an Indian yogui, of an Egyptian anchorite of the second century, or of a scholastic monk of the eleventh century, with the only difference that they do not make the demon intervene. They denounce in the same terms as of old the pitfalls of nature, of the flesh, and of life. And as the most terrible of these pitfalls is love, and as love is the creator and the triumphal sign of life, it is love that the monks of science attack with most obstinacy, tearing from it the amiable veil with which humanity has been pleased to adorn it, and leaving it only its animal character; they lay bare its original uncleanness and proclaim its dupery. If we look closely into the matter we can see that this philosophical conspiracy against love is gaining ground every day, even in frivolous and gallant Paris; we find the traces of it in French imaginative literature, and in the bitter irony of the emancipated stage.

I have mentioned the name of Tolstoï. He is incontestably the writer who has had most influence upon the moral tendencies of the young generation. All the young people whom you question on this subject make the same answer. I need not once more dwell upon the analysis of Tolstoï's ideas; they are as well known in America as they are in France. The Russian author has had the same rapid fortune all over the world, because he came at a psychological moment. When I undertook to translate and make known his works in France, I did not anticipate that they would be appreciated outside the limits of a small literary circle. All the experts told me that the Latin genius would prove refractory to the conceptions of this Slav. They were reckoning without taking into account a phenomenon which has become more and more apparent during the past few years, and which will characterize in history the curious epoch in which we are living. In the cultivated classes the ethnic differences are becoming effaced; the particular genius of each race loses every day somewhat of its individual physiognomy, and gives place to a universal genius which is sensibly the same for all intelligences within the civilized world. This result is due to our

modern cosmopolitanism, to the facility of relations, and to the general emancipation of minds. The uniformity of modern dress is merely the exterior sign of the uniformity that is being created in minds. The world already experienced one of these periods of fusion in the first centuries of our era. In spite of the diversity of races and idioms in the Roman Empire, superior thought lived on the same stock of ideas at Rome, at Antioch, at Alexandria, and at Salonica, from the Gauls to the Euphrates. Rome in creating political unity had amalgamated minds. In our own times unity of civilization is accomplishing the same work with still greater force and rapidity. This work will doubtless be completed in the next century. It is visible that a mysterious hand is equalizing the ground for some great building, the foundations of which will then become discernible. At the present moment all that we can see is a sad pile of ruins, from which the new spirit is with difficulty emerging. The thought of Count Tolstoï will have been one of the principal stimulants of this new spirit.

He was, indeed, well prepared to catch the ear of his contemporaries who could write in his religious confession: "I have lived in this world fifty-five years. With the exception of fourteen or fifteen years of childhood, I lived for thirty-five years a nihilist in the proper sense of the term; not a socialist and a revolutionist according to the perverted sense that usage has given to the word, but nihilist—that is to say, *empty of all faith*." Having conceived a horror of this emptiness, Tolstoï sought to fill it up. Throughout his great novels and philosophical works we can now follow and measure the evolution of this magnificent thought, just as we can follow in the firmament the parabola of a brilliant meteor. During the past forty years it has been reflected in the successive souls of a character which under different names is one and the same. Each of these souls fixes a moment of the evolution. In the author's first youth, Olénine, in the *Cossacks*, has a taste for life, and feels the joy of it; he proclaims life to be good in its simplest and most natural manifestations. Later, the heroes of *War and Peace* and of *Anna Karénine* steal away from this seduction of life, and rise above it, in order the better to examine it and seek its hidden meaning. Nev-

ertheless, they still accept life, admire the mystery of it, and comprehend it in all its aspects, with its necessary complexity. Little by little we see dawn in Lévine—the character in which Tolstoï has most completely incarnated himself—a lurking distrust of life. And in proportion as this personage is transformed in later works, such as the *Popular Tales*, *The Death of Ivan Ilitch*, etc., he no longer admits the multiple and luxuriant forms of life, but tries to limit it, and recognizes the legitimacy of it only in the humblest creatures, in the primary beings, like the Russian peasant. Finally, the *Sonate à Kreutzer* shows him entirely disgusted with life, and pronouncing against it an absolute condemnation. He would like to smother life, and dry it up in its well-spring, which is love. He no longer tolerates the realities of life, but takes refuge in an abstract ideal.

Contemporary youth has found its image in this blurred mirror. Certainly we should find very few young Frenchmen disposed to follow Tolstoï in the exaggerations of his old age, and to the extreme conclusions of his ruthless logic. But most young Frenchmen applaud his vigorous sarcasms against the falsehoods of civilization and against the roguery of human reason; and most of them feel, as he does, the need of discovering outside of themselves some reason to live, and with the greatest readiness they countersign that page of his confessions where Tolstoï has spoken for all of them: "I lost faith early in life. I lived for a while, like all the world, on the vanities of life. I practised literature, and, like the others, I taught that which I did not know. Then the Sphinx set to pursuing me, crueler than ever. 'Guess my riddle, or I will devour you.' Human science explained nothing to me. To my eternal question—the only question of importance—'Why do I live?' science replied by teaching me other things of which I take no heed. With science the only thing to be done was to join the time-honored chorus of the sages, Solomon, Socrates, Çakya-Mouni, and Schopenhauer, and repeat after them, Life is an absurd evil. At last I had the idea of seeing how the immense majority of men live, those men who do not, as we of the self-styled superior classes, give themselves up to the speculations of thought, but toil and suffer, and are yet tranquil and well-informed as to the aim

of life. I understood that we must live like this multitude, and return to its simple faith. But my reason could not accommodate itself to the corrupt teaching which the church imparts to the simple, and then I set about studying this teaching more closely, and separating the elements of superstition from the elements of truth."

I have quoted this passage because it defines as exactly as possible the state of soul of those who are called neo-christians. The appellation is a bad one, having been created without reflection for the requirements of journalism; however, we cannot but be content with it, seeing that it has now been sanctioned by common usage. Let us examine in detail some of the symptoms of this state of soul, such as has existed in France during the past two or three years.

One of the first symptoms is a sympathetic curiosity for religious questions and for that whole order of ideas which the elder generations set aside with contempt as old wives' tales. In the new laws revealed by the sciences of mind and of nature, the young French thinkers are disposed to look for that which can confirm the ancient intuitions of theology, and to continue under other names the traditions wherein the wisdom of the past has been concentrated. It is not long since it would have raised a smile in the French high schools if anybody had invoked the authority of Saint Thomas Aquinas in order to corroborate a fact of experimental psychology. Nowadays such comparisons are welcomed, and make men reflect. The movement in this direction grows stronger in proportion with the reaction against the philosophic ideas of the eighteenth century. The professors who are most eagerly listened to are those who, like MM. Brunetière and Faguet, battle with a sort of irritation against the spirit of the eighteenth century, and not unfrequently go back to Christian sources in order to support their independent conclusions.

These tendencies have changed the mutual relations of the students in all the French high schools. The majority, who have no fixed beliefs, show a quite new toleration and kindly feeling towards the openly Catholic minority. These latter no longer need courage in order to affirm their faith and to practise it. On the contrary, by a characteristic reaction, it is the antiquated sarcasms of Voltairianism that are nowadays received with smiles and

shrugging of the shoulders; disrespectful attacks upon religion irritate the young Frenchmen of the present day as something old-fashioned, and as an evidence of bad taste and weak-mindedness. It is a considerable sign in France when ridicule changes its object, and passes from one camp to the other. The humor of opposition natural to youth has some share in this change of attitude. When the government was clerical, the young men thought it their bounden duty to be sacrilegious; since the government has taken to ill-treating the Church, the young men have conceived a liking for the victim.

We must also take into account the religious side of that sentiment which now for some time past has taken the first place in hearts and minds; I mean socialism. Here, again, the influence of the Russian novelists, together with the great current of pity which they have brought into literature, has played a preponderating rôle. The "religion of human suffering" has made numerous adepts; for want of a more definite faith many hearts have sought refuge there. Men's minds were thus prepared to be beset by that social question which historical circumstances were about to bring to the front, and which at the present moment takes precedence over all other problems in Europe. French young men are, for the most part, indifferent and sceptical in political matters. The passions which inflamed their predecessors do not touch them; but, on the other hand, they are almost all socialists, if we understand by that word a sympathy, more or less reasoned and more or less active, for the actual efforts of the working classes. This infatuation has indeed become so general in France that it would be astonishing if we did not find the young men in the vanguard. The claims of the working classes are in direct opposition to the individualist principles of the revolutionary and philosophical catechism. Modern history goes to the institutions of the past to look for the type by which it tends to reorganize itself. Like the rest of the world, our young observers are struck by so unexpected a reaction, and they are none the less struck when they see the Church returning to the primitive evangelical tradition, and taking its share of direction in the movement that is carrying nations with it. The bold initiative of the prelates of England and

America—of Cardinals Gibbons, Ireland, and Manning—gave the signal. The pastors and some groups of parishioners in the continental churches of Germany, Switzerland, and France followed, timidly at first, and then with increasing resolution. Finally Rome spoke, and the last encyclical of Leo XIII. showed clearly towards which side its sympathies would henceforward incline. This very remarkable evolution is contributing to bring together in one common aspiration the believers and the freethinkers, whose only resolve is the good of the people. The adhesion of the French clergy to the republican régime has done away with the last prejudices that remained. This adhesion is confirmed every day by new instances, and the clergy is thus resuming its place in the life of the nation, whereas formerly it seemed to have shut itself up outside of that life. The sectarians and the old politicians look with alarm upon this change of attitude, but the young patriots applaud so desirable a reconciliation.

In literature these new-comers declare themselves disgusted with naturalism and scandalized by dilettanteism. They require their writers to have seriousness and moral inspiration. They have a marked taste for what is nowadays called "symbolism," that is to say, a form of art which, although painting reality, is constantly bringing reality once more into communication with the mystery of the universe. And as the models of this kind have been given by the mystic authors of the great epochs of faith, we see unbelieving men of letters who read with delight and praise above all things the *Imitation of Christ* and the writings of Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint François de Sales.

Does this mean that these thirsters after spiritual life justify literally the appellation of neo-christians which has been given to them? Not at all, if we attach to the term any idea of a formal return to orthodoxy. Their reason still revolts too strongly against the rigidity of dogma. The religion of science in which they have grown up retains the strongest hold upon their intelligence; and in spite of the deceptions which I have mentioned, they cannot make up their mind to abjure it. As long as they cannot see the possibility of fully conciliating their scientific conception of the universe and of man with the teaching of the Church, they will

repudiate the latter. They make desperate efforts to invent a religious and a moral ideal on the margin of the traditional doctrine. Extreme and unbalanced minds seek this ideal in spiritism; others wait patiently, with the hope that dogma will become transformed, and lend itself to the interpretations of science; the majority let themselves be rocked in the lap of a vague mysticism. They flutter around faith like iron filings around a magnet, secretly attracted by it, and yet not strongly enough to adhere firmly to it.

If proofs are needed of the very general movement which I am attempting to characterize, all that we have to do is to open the books of the observers mentioned in the beginning of this study. These observers are not open to suspicions, for they all remain entrenched in their independent positions outside of the pale of revealed religion, but nevertheless they are unanimous in affirming the violence of the new current. M. Rod, in his *Moral Ideas of the Present Time*, reduces all these ideas to a curve, which he makes out to start from M. Renan and the "negative minds," and to end in the "positive minds," such as Tolstoi and his French interpreters. He concludes as follows: "No great clear-sightedness is required in order to perceive that this positive current has gained in volume and force by as much as the negative current has lost. It began feebly; ten years ago it was scarcely perceptible, and those sagacious people who prefer to read the future rather than the present predicted, not without some show of reason, the approach of a new era in which humanity would throw away its two old crutches, morality and religion, and would advance with a light step in the path of free thought beneath the sunshine of science. And, behold, facts are now giving the lie most flagrantly to these augurs. Many ideas and beliefs which might have been thought to have fallen definitively into disfavor and almost into ridicule are resuming their old place, so that the cult of the ideal, formerly banished as absurd, is coming to life again in new forms, and the young men of the present day are beginning once more to celebrate morality and religion with the same enthusiasm as the young men of 1848 showed in celebrating science and freethinking."

M. Pouilhan, a philosopher of the positivist school, brings us identical testimony

in his *New Mysticism*. He qualifies in severe terms the period whence we are issuing. "Intellectual and Moral Anarchy," such is the title of the chapter which he devotes to the subject. He shows that this anarchy ought to engender a reaction, and that the reaction is already commencing. "At the present time," he writes, "we are witnessing the formation of a new spirit—I mean a new general way of considering man and the universe—a logical *ensemble* of ideas, beliefs, and sentiments; and this spirit, which is still far from having its definitive form, seems destined to differ notably from the spirit that preceded it, and even, as might be expected, to be directly opposed to it in certain respects. . . . The scientific spirit, the religious spirit, pity for suffering, the sentiment of justice, social mysticism, the attraction of mysterious facts which we begin to see developing, a gentle need of universal harmony—such are the principal elements out of which the new spirit is composed."

The most instructive testimony for us is that of M. Lasserre, the author of *The Christian Crisis*. M. Lasserre is a young student, and he attempts to express the sentiments of his comrades. In the very beginning of his book he is careful to take up his position as a resolute free-thinker, and he insists upon his unbelief with the somewhat boastful warmth of his years. This point being established, he proceeds to draw up a merciless act of accusation against all the political, social, and philosophical ideas of the revolutionary cycle. *A Hundred Years' Dream* is the title under which he judges and condemns the intellectual inheritance of the Revolution. We should need to quote every page of the book in order to show the bitterness of this criticism and the complete rupture between the young men of to-day and the liberalism of the preceding generations. "A fermentation, regrettable according to some, but none the less incontestable, is taking place in the majority of thinking heads. We have arrived at the expiration of a lease. The intellectual edifice in which we have been living for the past forty years no longer pleases us. The solutions that used to satisfy now disgust us, and those which once filled us with enthusiasm are withering before our eyes. This movement, real and profound as I believe, is destined perhaps to seriously

transform our conception of the universe, but the meaning and the future of which we cannot venture to predict without laying ourselves open to the charge of thoughtlessness. I do not pretend that faith is to be the last word of a crisis which is only just beginning. I cannot say. Any affirmation on this score would be premature. The best thing that we can do is to seek without prejudice what germs and what possibilities of true Christianity are really hidden in the moral growth that we are witnessing. But I know well that this crisis has only two possible issues, Christianity and paganism, to use a term which we shall need to explain. . . . During the past fourteen centuries there has not been expressed in Europe a single idea that can be comprehended and appreciated without taking into account its relation with the Gospel. . . . Science will not be, as some have maintained, the supreme form and the total and definitive manifestation of the religious sentiment. The kind of scientific faith whose glorious confession M. Renan formulated forty years ago is now approaching its decline. Certainly science is not losing courage. Science has not come to a standstill; it works with the mighty regularity of a public service; but it no longer recruits enthusiastic partisans outside of the circle of its adepts; it has ceased to speak to men's hearts, and it will soon speak no longer to their imaginations. . . . The present crisis is merely the very simple protestation of young and healthy consciences against the artificial régime which the last-comers of the preceding generation ardently advocate, although they affect an indifferent air. These young consciences feel something living and palpitating within them that bursts the bonds of science in which men have sought to imprison them entirely."

I might multiply these quotations, and borrow others from works of a similar nature which appear every week, and bear witness to the rapid metamorphosis of the young generations. In order to complete the demonstration it would be necessary to record the counterpart of these appeals to the future, and to note the cries of terror that may be heard in the crumbling edifice. The writers who are devoted to the cause of the revolutionary and anti-religious programme utter bitter lamentations, and predict the end of time.

Indeed, the expression of their astonishment is sometimes as comic as the horror of a hen who has hatched ducklings.

Doubtless these subterranean slippings of the French soil can with difficulty be perceived by foreigners. Indeed, if foreigners content themselves with listening to the rumors of Paris and taking a superficial view of France, if they derive their information from the artificial literature of the boulevard, from the noisy rehashes of the newspapers, and from the antiquated speeches of the politicians, they may well believe that nothing has changed. But if they would take the trouble to live with the professors and the students, to read serious publications, to follow the lectures of the Sorbonne, and sit on the benches of the schools of law and of medicine, they would at once discern the silent labor that is going on within the brain of the nation, in the intellectual centre whence the influences of the future will start.

To resume my essay, I would say that the young men of independent and cultivated thought are still for the most part refractory to any positive religion, but their prejudices against the religious idea have disappeared, and they sometimes even go to the point of declared sympathy. The sense of the eternal mystery has returned to their souls. That which most strongly dominates these young intellects is the instinct of the relation between things and the deep roots that the real has in the invisible, in other words, the sentiment of solidarity between men, the need of being associated in that universal human vibration which is the latent electricity of the moral world. In the new generations we notice the reappearance of one of the essential elements of the French race, namely, the collective and fraternal soul—democracy, as it is called nowadays—of the old Celtic and Gaulish stock, the soul of the forests and the mists, early oppressed by the hard Roman discipline, by the limiting and hierarchic spirit of these Latins who came from a country of rocks and clear skies. The local genius recovered courage when the Germans came, and found food appropriate to its temperament in the gospel of the fishers of Galilee. Since then the soil of France has been the field of a perpetual battle between the two tendencies. The Roman spirit triumphed in the exterior organization of French society, fash-

ioned the civil administration and the ecclesiastical organization, and inspired the great constructors of France, Philippe le Bel, Louis XI., Richelieu, Louis XIV., Napoleon. But below them the anterior soul revealed its persistency by the most opposite manifestations, such as the communes, the crusades, the monastic orders, and the revolutionists of all creeds. It produced indifferently a Peter the Hermit, a Saint Vincent de Paul, a Mirabeau, or a Saint-Simon and his disciples. This soul is once more cropping out. Everything announces the rising of the old sap. Everything is changing. Politicians, philosophers, writers, poets—all the dominations which have been accepted for a century past are shaken in their foundations; the new-comers escape from their grasp.

What will come of this gestation? I have here undertaken an objective study of the present moment; I will not incur the ridicule of venturing upon prophecy. Some believe that the neo-christians, as they are called with derision rather than with exactness, will simply become once more ordinary Christians, and return to the fold of the Church unconditionally. Others are of opinion that the full and complete reconciliation can only be accomplished by mutual concessions and by the abandonment of the transformation of such dogmas as are most disturbing for the scientific mind. The dreamers and the enthusiasts hope for a complement of Messianic revelation, and await the divine message which will answer the new wants of the human conscience. For my part, I am very much struck by an idea which I have come across in M. Boutmy's excellent work on the religious state of America. According to the learned professor, the North American is more and more indifferent to disputes about dogma, while at the same time he demands of religion more and more moral nourishment and social discipline. M. Boutmy attributes these effects to the intensity of the struggle for life in a very young, very laborious, and very individualistic society. The individual has all the more need of spiritual support in proportion as he feels himself more isolated in the battle of life, while he has the less leisure for theological subtleties as all his faculties are absorbed in this battle. French democracy is evidently tending to model

itself on the conditions of American life; the same causes will perhaps produce the same effects; the coming generations of France, less tormented by the scholastic genius, will pay little heed to what there may be at the bottom of a dogma, and will not look at the shape of the vase which will pour out for them the indispensable moral remedy.

Whatever may be the effective results of the neo-christian crisis, they will require a long time to come to a head; and when the religious idea has conquered the cultivated classes, it will have to reconquer by a slow process of infiltration the people at large, whom M. Taine has shown us returning to paganism. Popular beliefs have persisted obstinately beneath the unbelief of higher spheres, and yielded only gradually to the preaching of incredulity. They will be born again with the same slowness, as a consequence of preaching in the opposite sense. But once more I must confine myself to observation, and not allow myself to indulge in predictions as to the future. We are in presence of a nebula which is forming and wandering in the celestial space. The Creator alone knows the hour and the place which he has marked for the condensation of this nebula into a star, and for giving it the solidity and brightness of an organized world.

However imperfect and vague the nebula may be, men of good will prefer it to the gloom from which we are issuing. They are of opinion that the search after the ideal is a great sign of the raising up of France, where everything was on the point of sinking into gross realism, both characters and minds, both public morality and the intellectual productions. Those who have been the artisans of the present movement have the right to think that they have not lost their day's work; and since the writer of these pages has been often mocked for the modest part which he has taken in the movement, may he be here allowed to claim openly his share. He believes to-day that he has rendered his country a service in making known this renovation of the French conscience to the reflective minds of the New World, to the many friends of France who, from the other side of the ocean, are watching with sympathetic interest everything that can maintain and increase moral force in the fatherland of Lafayette and Rochambeau.