

JESUS
THE LAST GREAT INITIATE

BY
ÉDOUARD SCHURÉ

TRANSLATED BY
F. ROTHWELL, B.A.



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info@azafranbooks.com

CHAPTER I

CONDITION OF THE WORLD AT THE BIRTH OF JESUS

A SOLEMN period of the world's destiny was approaching; the sky was overshadowed with darkness and filled with sinister omens.

In spite of the efforts of the initiates, polytheism, throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe, had terminated only in the downfall of civilization. The sublime cosmogony of Orpheus, so gloriously chanted by Homer, had not been attained, and the only explanation possible is that human nature found great difficulty in maintaining a certain intellectual altitude. For the great spirits of antiquity, the gods were never anything more than a poetical expression of the subordinated forces of Nature, a speaking image of its inner organism; it is as symbols of cosmic and animic forces that these gods live indestructible in the consciousness of humanity. This diversity of gods and forces, the initiates thought, was dominated and penetrated by the supreme God or pure Spirit. The principal aim of the sanctuaries of Memphis, Delphi, and Eleusis had been precisely the teaching of this unity of God with the theosophical ideas and moral discipline resulting therefrom.

But the disciples of Orpheus, Pythagoras, and Plato failed before the egoism of the politicians, the sordidness of the sophists, and the passions of the mob. The social and political decomposition of Greece was the consequence of its religious, moral, and intellectual decomposition. Apollo, the Solar Word, the manifestation of the supreme God and the supra-terrestrial world, is silent. No more oracles, no more inspired poets are to be heard! Minerva, Wisdom, and Foresight, veils her countenance in presence of her people converted into Satyrs, profaning the mysteries, and insulting the gods in Aristophanic farces on the stage of Bacchus. The very mysteries themselves are corrupted, for and courtesans are admitted to the rites. ... When soul becomes blunted, religion falls into idolatry; when thought becomes materialized, philosophy degenerates into scepticism. Thus we see Lucian, poor microbe born from the corpse of paganism, turn the myths into ridicule, when once Carneades had denied their scientific origin.

Superstitious in religion, agnostic in philosophy, egoistical and divided in politics, reeling under anarchy and fatally abandoned to despotism. Greece had become sadly changed from the time when she transmitted the science of Egypt and the mysteries of Asia in immortal forms of beauty.

If there was one who understood what the world needed, and who endeavored to restore this need by an effort of heroic genius, that one was Alexander the Great. This legendary conqueror, initiated, as was also his father, Philip, into the mysteries of Samothrace, proved himself even more of an intellectual son of

Orpheus than a disciple of Aristotle. Doubtless, the Achilles of Macedonia, who, accompanied by a mere handful of Greeks, crossed Asia as far as India, dreamed of universal empire, but not after the fashion of the Caesars, by oppression of the people, and the destruction of religion and unfettered science. His grand idea was to reconcile Asia and Europe by a synthesis of religions, supported by scientific authority. Impelled by this thought, he paid homage to the science of Aristotle, as he did to Minerva of Athens, the Jehovah of Jerusalem, the Egyptian Osiris, and the Hindu Brahma, recognizing, as would a veritable initiate, an identical divinity and wisdom beneath these differing symbols. This new Dionysus possessed a broad sympathy and mighty prophetic insight. Alexander's sword typified the last flash of the Greece of Orpheus, illumining both East and West. The son of Philip died in the intoxication of victory and the glorious accomplishment of his dream, leaving the shreds of his empire to selfish and rapacious generals. But his thought did not die with him; he had founded Alexandria, where Oriental Philosophy, Judaism, and Hellenism were to be fused in the crucible of Egyptian esoterism, until the time might be ripe for the resurrection word of the Christ.

In proportion as Apollo and Minerva, the twin constellations of Greece, paled away on the horizon, the people saw a menacing sign, the Roman She-Wolf, rise in the troubled sky.

What is the origin of Rome? The conspiracy of a greedy oligarchy, in the name of brute force; the oppression of the human intellect, of religion, science, and art, by deified political power: in other

words, the contrary of truth, by which a government receives its justification, according to the supreme principles of science, justice and economy. [1]

The whole of Roman history is merely the consequence of the iniquitous pact by which the Conscript Fathers declared war, first, against Italy, and afterwards against the whole Roman race. They chose a fitting symbol; for the brazen She-Wolf, with tawny hair erect, and hyena's head turned in the direction of the Capitol, is the image of this government, the demon which will take possession of the Roman soul to the very end.

In Greece, at least, the sanctuaries of Delphi and Eleusis were long respected; at Rome, from the very outset, science and art were rejected. The attempt of the sage Numa, the Etruscan initiate, failed before the suspicious ambition of the Conscript Fathers. He brought with him the Sibylline books, which contained part of the science of Hermes, appointed magistrates elected by the people, distributed territory, and submitted the right of declaring war to the Fecial priests. Accordingly, King Numa, long cherished in the memory of the people, who regarded him as inspired by divine genius, seems to be a historical intervention of sacred science in the government. He does not represent the genius of Rome, but rather that of the Etruscan initiation, which followed the same principles as of Memphis and Delphi.

After Numa, the Roman Senate burnt the Books, ruined the authority of the flamens, destroyed arbitral institutions, and

returned to its old systems in which religion was nothing more than an instrument of public domination. Rome became the hydra which engulfed the peoples and their gods with them. The nations of the earth were gradually reduced to subjection and pillage. The Mamertine prison became filled with kings from North and South. Rome, bent on having no other kings than slaves and charlatans, destroys the final possessors of esoteric tradition in Gaul, Egypt, Judea, and Persia. She pretends to worship the gods, but the only object of her adoration is the She-Wolf. And now, away on the blood-stained dawn, there appears the final offspring of this ravenous creature, the embodiment of the genius of Rome-Caesar! Rome has conquered all the nations of the earth, Caesar, her incarnation, arrogates to himself universal power. He aspires not merely to become the ruler of mankind, for, uniting with the diadem, he causes himself to be proclaimed Chief Pontiff. After the Battle of Thapsus, deification as a hero is voted him, after that of Munda, divine apotheosis is granted by the Senate; his statue is erected in the temple of Quirinus, and a college of officiating priests appointed, bearing his name. To crown all in irony and logic, this very Caesar who deifies himself, denies in the presence of the Senate the immortality of the soul! Would it be possible to proclaim more openly that there is no longer any other God than Caesar.

Under the Caesars, Rome, inheritor of Babylon, extends her power over the whole world. What has become of the Roman State? It is engaged in destroying all collective life outside of governors and tax-collectors in the provinces. Conquering Rome feeds like a vampire on the corpse of a worn-out system.

And now the Roman orgies are freely and publicly paraded with all their bacchanalia of vice and crime. They begin with the voluptuous meeting of Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and will be brought to an end with the debaucheries of Messalina and the mad frenzy of Nero. They signalize their presence by a lascivious and public parody of the mysteries, and are destined to close in the Roman Circus, where nude virgins, martyrs to their faith, are torn to pieces and devoured by savage beasts, amid the plaudits of thousands of spectators.

And yet, among the nations conquered by Rome, there was one which called itself the people of God, whose genius was the very opposite to that of Rome. How conies it that Israel, worn out by intestine strife, crushed by three centuries of slavery, had preserved its indomitable faith? Why did this conquered people rise, prophet-like, to oppose Greek decadence and Roman orgies? Whence did they derive the courage to predict the fall of the masters who had their feet on the throat of the nation, and speak of some vague final triumph, when they themselves were drawing to an irremediable ruin? The reason was, that a great idea, inspired by Moses, lived in the nation. Under Joshua, the twelve tribes had erected a commemorative pillar with the inscription, "This is a testimony between us that Jehovah is God alone."

The law-maker of Israel had made monotheism the corner-stone of his science and social law, as well as of a universal religious idea. He had had the genius to understand that on the triumph of this idea the future of mankind would depend. To preserve it, he

had written a hieroglyphic book, constructed a golden ark, and raised up a people from the nomad dust of the wilderness. On these witnesses of the spiritualistic idea Moses brought down the lightning flash and the thunderbolt from heaven. Against them conspired not only the Moabites, the Philistines, the Amalekites, and all the tribes of Palestine, but even the frailties and passions of the Jewish people itself. The Book ceased to be understood by the priesthood; the ark was captured by enemies, numerous were the times when the people almost forgot their mission. Why then, in spite of all, did they remain faithful to this mission? Why had the idea of Moses remained graven on the brow and heart of Israel in letters of fire? To whom is due this exclusive perseverance, this magnificent fidelity amid the vicissitudes of a troubled history, such a fidelity as gave Israel a unique character among the nations? It may boldly be attributed to the prophets and the institution of prophecy; by oral tradition it may be traced back to Moses. The Hebrew people have had Nabi at all periods of its history, right to its dispersion. But the institution of prophecy appears first under an organic form at the time of Samuel. He it was who founded the confraternities of Nebiim, those schools of prophets, in the face of a rising royalty and an already degenerate priesthood. He made them austere guardians of the esoteric tradition and the universal religious thought of Moses against the kings, in whom the political idea and national aim was to predominate. In these confraternities were preserved the relics of the science of Moses, the sacred music, the occult art of healing, and finally, the art of divination, exercised by the great prophets with masterly force and abnegation.

Divination has existed under the most diverse forms among all the peoples of the ancient cycle; but prophecy in Israel possesses an amplitude, a loftiness and authority, belonging to the intellectual and spiritual nature in which monotheism keeps the human soul. The prophecy offered by the theologians, literally, as the direct communication of a personal God, denied by naturalistic philosophy as pure superstition, is in reality nothing but the superior manifestation of the universal laws of the Spirit. "The general truths which govern the world," says Ewald, in his fine work on the prophets, "in other terms, the thoughts of God, are immutable and incapable of attack, quite independent of the fluctuations of things, or of the will and action of men. Man is originally intended to participate in them, and translate them freely into acts. But for the Word of the Spirit to enter into carnal man, he must be fundamentally influenced by the great commotion of history. Then the Eternal Truth springs forth like a flash of light. This is why we so often read in the Old Testament that Jehovah is a living God. When man listens to the divine call, a new life is created in him; now he no longer feels himself alone, but in communion with God and all truth, ready to proceed eternally from one verity to another. In this new life, his thought becomes one with the universal will. He possesses a clear grasp of the present, and entire faith in the final success of the divine idea. The man who experiences this is a prophet, i. e., he feels himself irresistibly impelled to manifest himself before others as a representative of God. His thought becomes vision, and this superior might which forces the truth from his soul, at times with heart-breaking anguish, constitutes the prophetic element.

“The prophetic manifestations, throughout history, have been the thunderbolts and lightning flashes of truth.” [2]

From this spring, those giants, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah, drew their might. Deep in their caves or in the palaces of the kings, they were indeed sentinels of Jehovah, and, as Elisha said to his master Elijah, “the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof.” Often do they foretell with prophetic vision the death of kings, the fall of kingdoms, and the punishments to be visited on Israel. At times they are mistaken. The prophetic torch, though lit by the sun of divine truth, will vacillate and darken in their hands under the influence of national passion. But never do they waver concerning moral truths, the real mission of Israel, the final triumph of justice to mankind. As true initiates, they preach their scorn of outer worship, the abolition of sacrifices of blood, the purification of the soul, and the practice of love. It is with regard to the final triumph of monotheism, its liberating and peace-bringing role to all nations, that their vision is truly remarkable. The most frightful misfortunes that can strike a nation, foreign invasion, captivity in Babylon, cannot shake their faith. Listen to what Isaiah said during the invasion of Sennacherib:

“Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her.

That ye may suck and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.

For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees.

As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem.

And when ye see this, your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like an herb: and the hand of the Lord shall be known towards his servants, and his indignation toward his enemies.

For behold, the Lord will come with fire and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.

For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many.

They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination and the mouse shall be consumed together, saith the Lord.

For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and see my glory." [3]

It is only before the tomb of the Christ that this vision begins to find realization, but who could deny its prophetic truth when thinking of the part Israel played in the history of mankind?

No less firm than this faith in the future of Jerusalem, in its moral grandeur and religious universality, is the faith of the prophets in a Savior or a Messiah. They all speak of him; the incomparable Isaiah is still the one whose vision is clearest, and who depicts it with greatest force in bold, lofty language:

“There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of its roots;

And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord;

And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord, and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears;

But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked.

And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.” [4]

Before this vision, the gloomy soul of the prophet becomes calm and clear, as does a tempest-troubled sky after a storm. For now it is indeed the image of the Galilean which is present before his inner vision:

“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted.

But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.” [5]

For eight centuries the thunder-words of the prophets caused the idea and image of the Messiah to hover above all national dissensions and misfortunes, at times under the form of a terrible avenger, and again as an angel of mercy. The Messianic idea, tenderly nurtured under Assyrian despotism in Babylonian exile, and brought to light under Persian domination, continued to grow under the reign of the Seleucides and the Maccabees. When the Roman rule and the reign of Herod came, the Messiah was alive in the consciousness of all. The great prophets had seen him as a great man, a martyr, a veritable son of God ... the people, faithful to the Judaic idea, imagined him as a David, a Solomon, or a new Maccabeus. Whatever he might be, this restorer of Israel's greatness was believed in and expected by all. Such is the might of prophetic action.

Thus we see that just as Roman history ends in Caesar, along the instinctive path and infernal logic of Destiny, so the history of Israel leads freely to the Christ along the conscious path and divine logic of Providence, manifested in its visible representatives, the prophets. Evil is fatally condemned to contradict and destroy itself, for it is the False; but Good, in spite of all obstacles, engenders light and harmony after a lapse of time, for it is the fruit of Truth. From her triumph Rome obtained nothing but Caesarism, from her downfall Israel gave birth to the Messiah.

A vague expectancy hung over the nations. In the excess of its evil all humanity had a presentiment of a savior. For centuries mythology had dreamt of a divine child. The temples spoke of him in mystery; astrologists calculated his coming; frenzied sibyls had loudly proclaimed the downfall of pagan gods. The initiates had announced that some day the world would be governed by one of their own, a Son of God. [6] The world was expecting the spiritual king, such a one as would be understood by the poor and lowly.

The great Aeschylus, son of a priest of Eleusis, was almost killed by the Athenians for daring to say in the crowded theater, by the mouth of his Prometheus, that the reign of Jupiter-Destiny would come to an end. Four centuries later, under the shadow of the throne of Augustus, the gentle Virgil announces a new age, and dreams of a marvelous child--

“Ultima Cumaei venit jam carminis aetas;
Magnus ab integro saeculorum nascitur ordo.
Jam redit et Virgo, redeunt Saturnia regna:
Jam nova progenies coelo demittitur alto.
Tu modo nascenti puero, quo ferrea primum
Desinet, ac toto surget gens aurea mundo,
Casta, fave, Lucina; tuus jam regnat Apollo.

... Aspice convexo nutantem pondere mundum,
Terrasque, tractusque maris, coelumque profundum,
Aspice venturo laetantur ut omnia saeclo.” [7]

When will this child be born? From what divine world will this soul come? In what brilliant lightning-flash of love will it descend to earth? By what wonderful purity, what superhuman energy will it remember the abandoned heaven? By what mightier effort will it return from the depth of its earthly consciousness, taking with it mankind in its train?

No one could have told, but all were waiting and expecting. ... Herod the Great, the Idumean usurper, the protege of Augustus Caesar, was then at the point of death in his Cyprian chateau at Jericho, after a sumptuous and blood-stained reign, which had covered Judea with splendid palaces and human hectacombs. He was dying from a terrible malady, decomposition of the blood, hated by all, torn with fury and remorse, haunted by the spectres of his innumerable victims, amongst whom were numbered his innocent wife, the noble Marian, of Maccabee blood, and three of his own sons. The seven women of his harem had fled the presence of the royal phantom. His very bodyguard had abandoned him. Impassive by the side of the dying wretch sat his sister Salome, his evil genius, the instigator of his foulest crimes. With diadem on brow, and breast sparkling with precious stones, she kept watch, waiting for the king's last breath, when she in her turn would seize the reins of sovereignty.

Thus died the last king of the Jews. At this very moment had just been born the future spiritual king of humanity, [8] and the few initiates of Israel were silently preparing for his reign in profound humility and silence.