

MEN OF THE DAY. No. 194.

---

MR. JOSEPH ERNEST RENAN.

---

ERNEST RENAN was born six-and-fifty years ago in the Côtes du Nord of a people who are distinguished among Frenchmen for being still religious. Intended for a priest, he was sent to Paris for his priestly schooling, and showed therein so much aptitude and ability that he was selected to follow the course of high theology of the seminary of Saint Sulpice. During this course, however, he acquired more taste for philosophy and languages than belief in theology, and having acquired a considerable knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic, he declared himself independent, left for ever his priestly instructors, and took to publishing subversive writings on the Semitic tongues and the Greek language in the Middle Ages. He was now naturally taken up by the wicked learned, and at twenty-six he was sent to Italy on a mission of deciphering, which resulted in his being appointed at twenty-eight to a small place in the French National Library. In 1856 he was elected a member of the Académie des Inscriptions, and in 1860 he went on another deciphering expedition to Syria. Now it was that he first drew much attention to himself by his "Vie de Jésus"—a work in which he so thoroughly vulgarised the Gospel that all men wondered at it, and many protested vehemently against it. He began also to essay himself in politics. In those May elections of 1869 which were fatal to the Empire, he was an "Independent" candidate for the Seine et Marne, but he was defeated in his attempt to make of himself a legislator, and returned to his books and writings to publish essays on Liberty of every kind.

Ernest Renan is a man soaked with inscriptions—a very learned person, whose ambition is to be a journeyman Voltaire. His manners are good, he is extremely industrious, and has left many great and good things apparently less good and great than they had always been reputed before he touched them.