

One is One and All Alone and Evermore Shall Be So

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For English speaking readers of my generation Simone Weil was one of a galaxy of French writers who came to the fore just after the last war. I am thinking particularly of Congar, de Lubac, Daniélou, and Marcel. Time has dealt with their reputations very differently. Who remembers Marcel now? If Cardinal Daniélou is known to more people than Father Daniélou ever was, it is for rather special reasons. But in total these writers were a major cause of that *aggiornamento* in the Church we are still learning to cope with. They put out ways of thinking about theology both radically new and very traditional and in the process they devalued utterly the bankrupt pseudo-scholasticism that then ruled the roost. The most important of these writers were unquestionably de Lubac and Congar: but Daniélou too, is not to be forgotten with his work on typology. These theologians were among the first to have what is now commonplace—genuine argument and discussion with non-papist theologians of similar status. Some of them took part in an ecumenical seminar in Paris out of which came Oscar Cullmann's magisterial book on Peter. Less well-known than these is the Anglican Father Hebert, whose books on *The Authority of the Old Testament* and the *Throne of David* had considerable influence on Daniélou (to put it mildly). It is symptomatic of the time that I myself first heard of Hebert's books through Daniélou's review in *Dieu Vivant*. This periodical was the *New Blackfriars* of the day; although it was no more all-embracing of the Catholic intellectual milieu than is *New Blackfriars*, it was equally representative of an important current of opinion. It was also one of the first religious journals in which laymen wrote as well as clerics and religion was treated as a part of the educated person's culture not the specialist preserve of priests. For the moment theological fashion has moved from Paris across the Rhine and the theology of the Liberation has given way to the theology of the Common Market. Bultmann's style of exegesis is more fashionable than Daniélou's but, if Christianity is ever to take in the insights of Marx as it did those of Aristotle in the Middle Ages, typology seems to me to offer a more fruitful approach to the Bible than *Entmythologisierung* does. Rahner and Küng are more modish names than de Lubac and Congar these days and in my opinion are as inferior as

they are more prolix and cloudy. What is more, in so far as they are serious theologians, they are so because they have freedom of speculation not enjoyed by Catholic theologians since the Reformation, and they have that freedom because the Congars and de Lubacs won it for them. It is in this context that Simone Weil seemed to belong because her works came over from France at much the same time as the works of the writers I have mentioned.

She is known in England mainly for three texts written in the last few months of her life between her flight from Paris in 1940 and her death in England in 1943. One was a volume in that very French hubristic genre, the *Pensée*, known here as *Gravity and Grace*, which was written before 1942 but published posthumously by Gustave Thibon in 1947. I do not believe that even Pascal quite escapes the charge of pretentiousness in his *Pensées* and I am sure Simone Weil does not. What is one to make of this, taken at random from *Gravity and Grace*? “*The Foolish Virgins*—the meaning of the story is that at the moment when we become conscious that we have to make a choice, the choice is already made for good or ill. This is much truer than the allegory about Hercules between virtue and vice.” Is not this a little reminiscent of: “I sometimes wonder if this is what Krishna meant”? At any rate Mr. Eliot himself contributed the preface to her *Need for Roots*. This is Simone Weil’s political testament in which she bequeathed her thought on the shape of French political society and the principles upon which it should be built to the Free French committee in London. These thoughts it seems to me are of real interest and importance, but her best known book is a collection of spiritual letters and meditations, all written in 1942, but not collected until after the War under the title *Attente de Dieu* (and surely not without relevance to Beckett’s *En attendant Godot*?) and known here as *Waiting on God*.

All the books have prefaces. Simone Weil’s literary executors seem to have felt her work cannot be left to fend for itself. They prepare the reader to meet work written by an author of such exceptional humility, charity, and insight that criticism would be impertinent. The posture recommended for reading these books is a receptive reverence. They are surrounded by a hedge of spiritual taboos designed quite obviously to turn criticism aside by presenting their author as a modern saint and supporting this claim by a brief hagiographical account of her life.

The salient points of this life run as follows. Although she was what used to be called gently-nurtured and highly-educated; well-equipped for, and provided with, a well-paid academic post, she voluntarily worked for a year in a factory, shared “the sufferings of the Republican army for several weeks on the Catalonian front” and “experienced in the very depths of her being the utter calamity of war”. Having taken refuge in the Marseilles region after the

fall of France, she came into contact with a Dominican priest, Father Perrin, and began to take an open interest in Catholic Christianity. She was thought to be too humble to feel herself worthy of baptism—hence the title *Waiting on God*—though Father Perrin seems to have felt she both could and should have been received into the Church. He introduced her to a Catholic intellectual farmer, Gustave Thibon, who gave her the opportunity she longed for to share the life of the peasants in the fields. She then left France for the USA with her parents. As they were all Jewish their lives were in some danger. She then got permission to leave New York for London where she worked for the Free French Committee but insisted on living on the rations then obtaining in occupied France. As a result, being in poor physical shape from her previous privations, she died in an English sanatorium in 1943. This is a summary, with actual quotations, from the preface to *Waiting on God*: M. Thibon does not greatly differ in *Gravity and Grace*. Both sources present Simone Weil as a mystical writer and thus dodge the issue of why she never accepted baptism. It would again be bad form to ask the question, to press the question, why a mystic of prodigious asceticism, should remain outside the visible Church. It is this version of Simone Weil that has captured the attention of the well-known spiritual *faux durs* (hard outside, soft inside) of our own day. André Gide thought her the best spiritual writer of the century and the patron saint of all outsiders: our own Malcolm Muggeridge has pronounced her the greatest mystical writer of the century. It was high time that we should be given an exhaustive account of her life that would enable her writing to be placed in its proper context. This has now been provided by her lifelong friend, Simone Pétrement, in the shape of a substantial biography, translated into a stilted mid-Atlantic idiom full of pals and pubs by Raymond Rosenthal and published by Mowbrays at £10. Dr. Pétrement's book is itself hagiography, and none the worse for that. She tells us that from her childhood on, Simone Weil was told by a variety of people, including Dr. Pétrement, that she was a saint. So convinced is Dr. Pétrement of her friend's sanctity that she feels she has only to tell the story as it was. There is no re-touching here. The Simone Weil of the book is the Simone Weil of the works, and very unattractive she appears, to all but her more devoted admirers. The received hagiography gets short shrift.

All her life Simone Weil was accustomed to eat the minimum of food. In large part this was due to a genuine compassion for the poor and needy and a feeling of guilt for her own prosperous bourgeois upbringing. During her time in Vichy France she gave half her rations away. When she arrived in England it seems doubtful if she were capable of ingesting sufficient food to keep her alive. Dr. Pétrement points out that she did not live off the same rations as

were available in occupied France, whose amount she did not know. Indeed she seems to have eaten rather less. She then became tubercular and her inability to eat properly finally killed her. The hospital authorities insisted on an inquest, and since her abstinence from food was at least partly voluntary, a verdict of suicide was recorded. Dr. Pétrement rightly challenges the justice of this verdict. She convincingly shows that Simone Weil did not deliberately starve herself and suggests, plausibly enough, that she could no longer eat properly.

She did not work for a year in a factory. She had a year's leave of absence and worked as a member of a normal workforce in the Renault factory for two months. Her sharing of the peasants' life in the fields amounted to help with the harvest of the sort undertaken by thousands of students of all nationalities in their long vacations. Of her part in the Spanish Civil War I shall speak in a moment: it does her no sort of credit. In fact Simone Weil's experience, as distinct from her antics, was largely that of a member of the academic elite produced by the *grands écoles*. She was certainly an intellectual before all else and Dr. Pétrement was certainly right to make her *Life* a history of its subject's opinions. This is very much an intellectual history. Dr. Pétrement plainly thinks that Simone Weil's main importance was as a spiritual writer and a religious teacher, but she cannot, nor does she try to, conceal the fact that the works were overwhelmingly concerned with politics, practical as much as philosophical politics.

Curiously enough the only writer known to me who has seen that Simone Weil was basically a political writer is Conor Cruise O'Brien in his study 'The Anti-Politics of Simone Weil' (*New York Review of Books*, May, 1977). Senator O'Brien wrote of the France Simone Weil recommended in *The Need for Roots* that it "would probably have resulted in something like Vichy France ... but minus collaboration with Nazis and with de Gaulle at the top instead of Pétain." Not a bad prevision of the Fifth Republic one would have thought. He contrasted her with Edmund Burke, and he called her anti-political in contrast to Burke whom he thinks a properly political animal, because "Politics proceeds by associations of people, and Simone Weil had a deep-seated aversion from such associations". Burke on the contrary, "set a high value on friendship, and his conception of a group of friends working in concert for political ends was a stage in the development of the modern political party." *The modern political party!* The National Front, the British Liberal party as friends working in concert with agreed political aims, *Sinn Fein*, the USA Republican party? It is, of course true that Simone Weil placed no value on the political parties of pre-war France and proposed to ban them in the new France but would she have rejected the MRP? But, more importantly, let us take Senator O'Brien's concept of the political

importance of the group of friends. She knew Jacques Soustelle, distantly Pierre Mendès-France but Maurice Schumann intimately, and she was on excellent terms with André Philip. De Gaulle she never met, but his well-known dismissal of her as mad was not prompted by her thinking, which strikingly anticipated his own, but by a harebrained project for a group of frontline nurses without medical training hovering over the dying like Valkyries. He certainly read at least one of her papers: I suspect he read a great deal more of her than that. Her views on the formation of a supreme council of the resistance were certainly taken into account when it was set up.

Simone Weil was a remarkable political writer and subsequent events have shown she was no crank. She was remarkably perceptive about the probable consequences of Zionism, to which she was implacably opposed. She thought that if the French tried to go on ruling Indo-China and Algeria as they had done previously, the result would be a catastrophe for France as well as her colonies. She did not propose, however, that they should become independent but that France should exercise a true protectorate over them. She was, in other words, an enlightened paternalist, as were, initially, many of those who later supported repression in Algeria and lamented Dien Bien Phu. She mistrusted French chauvinism and proposed to curb it partly by a ban on political parties as traditionally known, partly by an international organisation with teeth, a *Europe* with regulatory powers. Her solution is a remarkable anticipation of the Common Market in a version perhaps nearer to General de Gaulle and Peter Shore than to Roy Jenkins but none the less remarkable for that. It is worth noting here that she was a close friend of Maurice Schumann who was one of the tiny group at her funeral and in default of a priest presided over the ceremony. She was also, it should be remembered, specially brought over from New York in wartime to write political papers for a group of men who were to play so great a part in the Fourth Republic and the formation of the Common Market. Her political writings, far from being the ejaculations of an anti-political innocent, laid the foundations for the thinking of the new Right in France. She was not all that unlike Edmund Burke though possibly rather more effective. If I were a student of modern French history I should take a long hard look at Simone Weil and her circle.

Dr. Pétrement is, then, to be thanked for doing some justice to Simone Weil's political *oeuvre*, but she herself has no doubt that her friend mattered as a religious thinker and that she was a mystical and spiritual writer of genius. It is plain they thought very much alike. Dr. Pétrement is very self-effacing in her book but reading between the lines it is obvious that she exercised considerable influence on Simone Weil through her study of writers of various gnostic traditions, a study to which she has

devoted her life. However Simone Weil's religious teaching has had far less influence than her political. This is, at least in part, due to the school of French writers I discussed at the beginning of this paper. One of the earliest assessments of her was a fiercely hostile review in *Dieu Vivant*, which unlike Father Perrin, would not accept her claim to be Christian at all. The *Dieu Vivant* people and their circle were not particularly political. They had no illusions about the Soviet Union to repent of and they did have a very justified distrust of the French Right. They regarded the Communist Party as the party of the Resistance rather than the party of Stalin—until he and Maurice Thorez persuaded them to the contrary. This was the time of the worker-priests, the *Mission de France*, and Cardinal Suhard's famous pastoral letter. It was theologians of this school who laid the intellectual foundations on which the worker-priest movement was built (even Danielou was cautiously sympathetic in these years: at any rate he expressed himself so in a conversation I had with him). Pius XII sought to squash the *Dieu Vivant* school and the worker-priests in one go in *Humani Generis*: an encyclical now largely forgotten but nasty and brutally effective at the time. It is hardly surprising that such a circle did not take to Simone Weil and plainly one was wrong in thinking it was amongst them that she really belonged. But what in fact was her spiritual teaching?

It needs to be said first that she was not a mystical writer in any but the most watered-down sense. She was certainly not a mystic as Teresa of Avila or John of the Cross were. *Waiting on God*, her 'mystical' book *par excellence*, is mainly a spiritual autobiography that treats theological matters in a non-scholastic way unusual for the time but I cannot see that it is in any sense mystical. Indeed at times she sounds much nearer to the late Cardinal Heenan than to Teresa of Avila: "I have an extremely severe standard for intellectual honesty, so severe that I have never met anyone who did not seem to fall short of it in more than one respect; and I am always afraid of failing in it myself." Modesty was not one of her most striking virtues. Mystical she was not but moralising she certainly was.

In *Waiting on God* is a meditation on school studies "with a view to the love of God". The general line is rather like that of the seminary to which Julien Sorel was sent in *Le Rouge et le Noir* and it makes what seems to me a devastatingly mistaken point: "All wrong translations, all absurdities in geometry problems, all clumsiness of style and all faulty connection of ideas in compositions and essays, all such things are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to the truth. The cause is always that we have wanted to be too active; we have wanted to carry out a search. This can be proved every time, for every fault, if we trace it to its

root.” Of course “we” have wanted to carry out a search because “we” know that truth is not to be had so easily, so like solving a cross-word puzzle, as is alleged here. The problems of translation are not at all like those of mathematics, and whilst they begin with a proper attention to the text they do not end there. This view is all the more pernicious in that Simone Weil was prepared to erect a law of censorship upon it—she proposed to punish Maritain for misunderstanding Aristotle. On this view all knowledge is clear, simple, at hand for the passive and deserving and all mistakes are due to delinquency. I think this view is detestable and her further remark that “every school exercise ... is like a sacrament” Jansenist rubbish. Nor did she altogether practise what she preached. As a young student she wrote an essay on Descartes’s theory of perception for the greatest Cartesian scholar of the day, Brunschvig. As she simply ignored Descartes’s text in favour of fancies of her own, though apparently intelligent fancies, he gave her the lowest possible pass mark, which seems to have rankled for a very long time. She felt herself competent to compose some reflections on the foundations of quantum mechanics in which she argued that Max Planck had made a fundamental mistake. I do not know that she has persuaded anyone else of the fact. In a late letter she wrote: “I think that the first eleven chapters of Genesis (up to Abraham) can only be a translation, mutilated and recast, of an Egyptian sacred book; that Abel, Enoch and Noah are gods, and that Noah is identical with Osiris, Dionysus and Prometheus”.

She often talked the language of Christian spirituality. She would not accept baptism but many pious Catholics, notably Father Perrin, thought she could and should have. Dr. Pétrement thought she did not deviate from Catholicism but expressed its deepest truths. Some of her writings seem to justify these opinions. She was certainly capable of saying some very perceptive things about the Christian teaching. She longed to take part in Communion, attended Mass, read the Gospels—her view that, because in the story of the woman taken in adultery Jesus did not specifically forbid the punishment of stoning when people are lawfully stoned he throws the first stone, suggests to me her reading of them was rather like her reading of Descartes, wilful. She loved to hear the chant at Solesmes, adored St. Francis and envied the thief crucified alongside Jesus. But she hated the Old Testament, or most of it, apart from the bits she re-wrote, and what she called the Hebrew and Roman aspects of Catholicism. Because of this James Cameron (*New York Review of Books*, March 1977) thought it was her inability to accept her own, and the Church’s Jewish traditions, that prevented her accepting baptism. There are two points to be made here.

First it needs to be remembered in fairness to Simone Weil that it was not easy in her day for a lay person, particularly an er-

udite and articulate woman of Jewish origin, to accept membership of the Church without loss of integrity. You needed to be authoritarian in mind, prepared to accept General Franco as a bastion of civilisation and the cult of Fatima as the ultimate in Christian spirituality, and repudiate leftist or even liberal ideas. For readers who never knew the *ambience* of this period or have forgotten it, it is worth looking at the back numbers of *The Tablet*—for whom, even after 1945, de Gasperi was a Red fifth-columnist—or anything by Douglas Woodruff—who in the *Downside Review* in the early 30s was calling for a federation of Christendom presided over by the Pope. The Catholicism of the day was silly as well as viciously right-wing. It is clear that Simone Weil did realise that membership of the Church as it then was, was all too likely to present problems of integrity. At the very end of her life she wrote: “I do not recognise any right of the Church to limit the workings of the intelligence or the illuminations achieved by love in the domain of thought.” She also feared what she called the Church’s patriotism by which she meant the tendency of the time to encourage conformity without much examination of conviction. There is, in her correspondence with her Catholic friends a just and courteous critique of the camp Catholicism of the day. It is Father Perrin, and men like Gustave Thibon, who divorced adherence to the Church from convictions about it and obscured what Simone Weil’s real religion was about. The second point then, about her non-adherence to the Church is precisely this: what were her real religious convictions?

She hated the Hebrew element in religion. She did not mean by this the historical Jewish religion. History for her was something to be made up as and when convenient. She meant by ‘Hebrew’ the historical and therefore the institutional aspects of Catholicism. She could not accept the notion of a chosen people because she always took it in its triumphalist sense and never in the sense, so common in the Old Testament, of a people chosen for suffering, exile and captivity. She opposed to this ‘Hebrew’ religion the religion of the Orient, about which she seems to have known nothing outside the Hindu and Buddhist scriptures as interpreted by herself. She thought Jesus would never have been crucified had he been born and raised in India, and in any case she did not believe that he was in any way unique. It would have been too bad of God to deprive mankind of an adjacent god and sacraments for several millenia until a crucified slave appeared. With these views she naturally had difficulties about conversion from one religion to another. “Each religion is an original combination of explicit and implicit truths; what is explicit in one is implicit in another.” One notices that the possibility of irreconcilable clashes between one form of religion and another is implicitly ruled out. Catholicism has a special status: ... in spite of all the varieties of

religion which exist in Europe and America, one might say in principle, directly or indirectly, in close or distant manner, it is the Catholic religion which forms the native background of all men belonging to the white races." This is not the only touch of Maurras to be found in Simone Weil.

The effects of her syncretism had better be illustrated by direct quotation. "According to Hindu tradition, King Rama, the incarnation of the second Person of the Trinity, was obliged, much to his regret, to avoid scandal among his people by executing a man of low caste who had broken the law through giving himself up to the ascetic practice of religion. The King went himself to find the man and slew him with a stroke of his sword. Immediately afterwards the soul of the dead man appeared to him and fell at his feet, thanking him for the degree of glory conferred on him by the contact of his blessed sword. Thus the execution, although quite unjust in one sense, but legal and carried out by the very hand of God, had in it all the virtue of a sacrament." Christians are accustomed to taking seriously the life and teaching of several low caste ascetics: one of them was a joiner's son who not only broke the law but claimed to change it, and when he was executed he asked God to forgive those responsible but he did not thank him or them for the experience. It is hardly surprising that Simone Weil had no time at all for St. Joan. Her brother André was to my mind much nearer the mark than Father Perrin when he said to her "I can only see one problem: it is that you would have exactly the same reason for adhering to Hinduism, Buddhism, or Taoism." She herself approved of the point, which gives Dr. Pétrement some trouble. Her solution is to point out that Simone Weil loved Krishna but she loved Christ more. T. S. Eliot wondered if that was what Krishna meant: Simone Weil only too dreadfully knew.

Her syncretic religion had its parallel in her synthetic politics, which were rooted in distrust, often acutely and justly formulated, of what she knew, of where she was. This led her to stand outside her own time and place and to call up remedies and controls from her own mind disguised as the Orient or Europe or wherever. It is very Weilian to find the European Iron and Steel community was dreamt up in the Moral Re-armament château at Caux. She was very shocked by a remark of Péguy to the effect that if there were no Frenchmen God would have no one to understand him. She did see that Péguy spoke with a smile but she thought a shocking chauvinism underlay the remark nonetheless. Péguy, unlike Simone Weil, was a genuine radical, and like most such had a very real sense of the tradition to which he belonged whether he liked it or not. Péguy's radicalism was rooted in a real tradition, not a self-selected one like Simone Weil's (and that of her fellow-*normaliens* of our own day who have been busy purging Paris of its useless past in the name of development). He meant, I think, to

draw attention to the way French religious writers have stood at the heart of Catholic intellectual development from the dispersal of the Dark Ages in French monasteries of the tenth century to the *aggiornamento* of our own time. Simone Weil could not understand this because her French religious tradition—the Albigenses, Cardinal de Retz, Pascal, Descartes, Villon, Rabelais, Claudel—was purely subjective with little regard for what her favourite authors actually said, merely what it suited her to take them to mean. Her notion of the French political tradition was a very thin thing. It hardly included the Revolution or the Jacobins, in which and whom she had no interest. So far as I can see, apart from Marx about whom she had perceptive and original things to say, her politics was derived entirely from her own personal experience. Like her religion, her politics was rooted in a reality constructed from a limited experience by a mind that could never recognise the limitations of that experience. She thought that cultural roots, like plants, could be grown by taking selected cuttings, sticking them in the ground and soaking them in root-feeder. But roots for most of us are something given; for a woman of Simone Weil's time and place there were rich enough ones if only she had been able to stop talking long enough to look around her.

She went to quite a remarkable number of priests 'for instruction', except that she seems, quite consciously, to have thought she was instructing them. Her letters to Father Perrin are positively encyclicals and when she met priests who would not play her game or had no time for her she did not like it. Her personal culture was vulgar and *bien pensant*. She went to Italy and loved the Art: Michaelangelo, Botticelli, the usual names—no, she did not like Raphael—it is all so like the art bit of a western civics course for American freshmen. She was much concerned about the Spanish Civil War, visited Catalonia and "experienced in the depths of her being the utter calamity of war". When Franco won, the Italian Fascists borrowed the treasures of the Prado and toted them round from city to city in a kind of neo-Roman triumph. Under the circumstances it seems to me disgusting insensitivity that Simone Weil paid a special visit to Genoa to see them: she wanted to study Velasquez! It is not recorded that when she was in New York she went to see Picasso's *Guernica*, but her taste was strictly *bien pensant* and the *bien pensants* had not yet got round to Picasso. She told David Garnett that T. E. Lawrence was the only man of any time she could wholeheartedly admire, though St. Francis and Tolstoy ran him close. She thought the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* the greatest epic since the *Iliad*. She had indeed a good deal in common with Lawrence: the same irresponsible love of action without regard for any point—and the same fondness for writing rather toadying letters to the famous, combining a posture of humility with an assumption of equality. She also

liked *Les Misérables* and Antoine de St. Exupéry.

She had real feeling for the poor and oppressed, but like George Orwell she did not like them in the mass and she could never conceive of treating them as equals. She could not understand the degree of acceptance and resignation she found amongst the workers at the Renault factory. She could not understand that the feeling of men and women born to such labour who had no expectation of ever escaping it was likely to be less intense than the feeling of a woman devoting a few weeks of a sabbatical to seeing how the other half lived. In any case her main concern seems to have been with her own emotions and states of mind whilst she was in the factory. But the Renault factory was no substitute for Lough Derg and St. Patrick's Purgatory. She betook herself to the Spanish War and arrived on the Catalonian front. She took a rifle to war with a bullet in it and Dr. Pétrement is almost, but not, quite sure she meant to fire it. Fortunately the sector was quiet since she was so short-sighted she accidentally put her foot into a pan of boiling fat. That under the circumstances she was nothing but a menace and a nuisance never seems to have occurred to her. She was too busy being penetrated by experience: too busy to quite make up her mind as to which side she was really on. Her last antic was a plan she conceived for countering the SS in the last war. There was to be a squad of women led by herself who would tend the dying in the front line. She did actually take some classes in first aid. While getting killed themselves and thus showing the SS –quite what – is not very clear, but she seems to have had a very romantic notion of what the SS were actually about. She was an élitist who hated the flesh, whether in the form of food or sex. One of the meditations included in *Waiting on God* is on the Lord's Prayer and she makes some powerful comments. But on 'Give us this day our daily bread' she is fantastic. I know that there are difficulties in rendering the Greek text as 'daily bread' but that cannot justify taking the petition to mean the opposite of what it says. Simone Weil equates bread with money, ambition, consideration, decorations, celebrity, power, our loved ones—what a curious list— and:

“all these objects of attachment go together with food, in the ordinary sense of the word to make up the daily bread of this world.... We should not ask for earthly bread.”

It will not be surprising that her religion was of little value in ordering her life or governing her relationships. Indeed, since it was the made-up religion of a wilful girl whose boundless intellectual vanity exceeded even her considerable intelligence, this is hardly surprising. Nor is it surprising, though it is ironic, that her biography should be more concerned with food than the biography of anyone one can think of, other than Escoffier.