Élisée Reclus

Exiled Anarchist Geographer, Environmentalist, and Animal Rights Activist

(1830 - 1905)

**Description** : Reclus was also actively involved in a number of societies during this time, including the Freemasons, the Freethinkers, the International Brotherhood of Michael Bakunin, and a number of anarchist cooperatives. In 1864, Élisée and Elie even helped to co-found the first Rochdale-type cooperative in Paris. (From : Samuel Stephenson Bio)

**Tags** : anarchist, french, geographer, writer, activist, ecologist.

**Quotes** :

"Everything that can be said about the suffrage may be summed up in a sentence. To vote is to give up your own power. To elect a master or many, for a long or short time, is to resign one's liberty." (From : "Why Anarchists Don't Vote," by Élisée Reclus.)

"The possession of power has a maddening influence; parliaments have always wrought unhappiness. In ruling assemblies, in a fatal manner, the will prevails of those below the average, both morally and intellectually." (From : "Why Anarchists Don't Vote," by Élisée Reclus.)

"How can a worker, enrolled by you among the ruling class, be the same as before, since now he can speak in terms of equality with the other oppressors?" (From : "Why Anarchists Don't Vote," by Élisée Reclus.)

**Biography** :

Élisée Reclus 1

French geographer, was born at Sainte-Foy la Grande (Gironde), on the 15th of
March 1830. He was the second son of a Protestant pastor, who had a family of twelve children, several of whom acquired some celebrity either as men of letters, politicians or members of the learned professions.

His education, begun in Rhenish Prussia, was continued in the Protestant college of Montauhan, and completed at the university of Berlin, where he followed a long course of geography under Karl Ritter.

Withdrawing from France in consequence of the events of December 1851, he spent the next six years (1852—57) visiting the British Isles, the United States, Central America, and Colombia. On his return to Paris he contributed to the Revue des deux mondes, the Tour du monde and other periodicals a large number of articles embodying the results of his geographical work. Among other works at this period was an excellent short book, Histoire d’un ruisseau, in which he traces the development of a great river from source to mouth. In 1867—68 he published La Terre; description des phénomènes de la vie du globe, in two volumes.

During the siege of Paris, Reclus shared in the aerostatic operations conducted by M. Nadar, and also served in the National Guard, while as a member of the Association Nationale des Travailleurs he published in the Cri du Peuple a hostile manifesto against the government of Versailles in connection with the Communist rising of the 18th of March 1871.

Continuing to serve in the National Guard, now in open revolt, he was taken prisoner on the 5th of April, and on the 16th of November sentenced to transportation for life; but, largely at the instance of influential deputations from England, the sentence was commuted in January 1872 to perpetual banishment.

Thereupon, after a short visit to Italy, he settled at Clarens, in Switzerland, where he resumed his literary labors, and, after producing the Histoire d’une montagne (a companion to Histoire d’un ruisseau), wrote nearly the whole of his great work, La Nouvelle Géographic universelle, la terre et les homines, 19 vols. (1875—94). This is a stupendous compilation, profusely illustrated with maps, plans, and engravings, and was crowned with the gold medal of the Paris Geographical Society in 1892. An English edition appeared simultaneously, also in 19 vols., the first four by E. G. Ravenstein, the rest by A. H. Keane.

Extreme accuracy and brilliant exposition form the leading characteristics of all Reclus’s writings, which thus possess permanent literary and scientific value.
In 1882 Reclus initiated the "Anti-Marriage Movement," in accordance with which he allowed his two daughters to marry without any civil or religious sanction whatever. This step caused no little embarrassment to many of his well-wishers, and was followed by government prosecutions, instituted in the High Court of Lyons, against the anarchists, members of the International Association, of which Reclus and Prince Kropotkin were designated as the two chief organizers. The prince was arrested and condemned to five years' imprisonment, but Reclus, being resident in Switzerland, escaped.

After 1892 he filled the chair of comparative geography in the university of Brussels, and contributed several important memoirs to French, German and English scientific journals. Among these may be mentioned "The Progress of Mankind" (Contemp. Rev. , 1896); "Attila de Gerando" (Rev. Géograph. , 1898); "A great Globe" (Geograph. Journ. , 1898); "L'Extrême-Orient" (Bul. Antwerp Geo. Soc. , 1898), a thoughtful study of the political geography of the Far East and its possible changes; "La Perse" (Bul. Soc. Neuchateloise, 1899); "La Phénice et les Phéniciens" (ibid., 1900); La Chine et al diplomatie européenne ("L'Humanité nouvelle" series, 1900); L'Enseignement de la géographie (Instit. Geograph. de Bruxelles, No. 5, 1901). Shortly before his death Reclus had completed L'Homme et la terre, in which he set the crown on his previous greater works by considering man in his development relative to geographical environment.

Reclus died at Thourout, near Bruges, on the 4th of July 1905.

— From the 1911 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, pages 957-58


Works :

Author of An Anarchist on Anarchy (November 30, 1883)
Author of Dar Fûr (December 31, 1969)
Author of Evolution and Revolution (November 30, 1890)
Author of Fragment of a Voyage to New Orleans (November 30, 1854)
Author of The Ideal and Youth (November 30, 1894)
Author of To the editors of la Huelga General in Barcelona (December 04, 1901)
Author of On Vegetarianism (from the Humane Review) (December 31, 1900)
Author of The Death Penalty (November 30, 1922)
Author of Preface to Kropotkin's Words of a Rebel (December 31, 1969)
Author of Why Anarchists Don't Vote (December 31, 1969)
Author of The History of a Mountain (November 30, 1880)

Chronology:

March 15, 1830: Élisée Reclus's Birth Day.

Links:

• Anarchy Archives: Élisée Reclus Archive
  http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/bright/reclus/reclus.html
• Anarchist Library: Élisée Reclus
  https://theanarchistlibrary.org/category/author/elissee-reclus
• Wikipedia: Élisée Reclus
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C3%89lis%C3%A9e_Reclus

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