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## Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

**A BANKRUPTCY OF SCIENCE.**

IN the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, of January 1st, M. Brunetière, the editor, publishes an article containing the conclusions formed by him as the result of an audience which he had recently had with the Pope. The view which the writer takes of the relation of science towards mankind in their spiritual character strikes us as particularly important. The time, he says, is not very far off, at which a learned incredulity commonly passed as a mark or a proof of a superior intellect or strength of mind. Science pleads the results it has achieved in a little time—but it has promised more than belongs to the sphere of the chemist or the physicist—and here is where it has become bankrupt. The writer claims that the physical or natural sciences have not fulfilled their promise of doing away with mystery. They are powerless, he says, not only to answer, but even properly to put the only weighty questions—those which touch on the origin of man, the law of his conduct, and his future lot. The writer, nevertheless, gives full credit to science for its achievements—to Darwin for his work. The natural sciences, he admits, may perhaps tell us what man is as an animal. They will never tell us what he is as a man. They have failed miserably, and always shall fail, to tell us what is the origin of language, of society, of morality. They cannot tell us where we are going. Nay, they have only succeeded in strengthening our attachment to life—what seems, in truth the very height of unreasonableness in beings who must die. Nor have the philological sciences kept their promises. They had undertaken, for example, to show in the writings of Marcus Aurelius or Epictetus, the scattered members of the Sermon on the Mount—but the Sermon on the Mount has conquered the world—and those other writings have done nothing. After, as before, the works of the Hellenists, there remains in Christianity something inexplicable by Hellenism—a singular virtue, an unique power of propagation and life. This, too, is confirmed by the works of the Hebraists. They, for their part, had promised to dissipate what was "irrational" and "marvellous" in the history of the origins of Christianity, and of the "people of God," to show us the Bible as on a par with other ancient books. But their systems, as numerous as they are arbitrary, have confused what they undertook to clear. Far from having expelled from the history of Christianity the "irrational" or the "marvellous" exegesis has reinstated it there. Even in the history of Buddhism the analogies of evolution which it thought it had discovered, have not held out before a more careful and more conscientious examination. The Orientalists, again, have failed in their promise. Perhaps, indeed, by a change in their method they may one day become the most dangerous enemies of Christianity; but, meantime, they also have brought a disturbing element into the discussion. Have we not seen them assert that Sakya Mouni was, perhaps, only a solar myth, and, if they succeed in proving this, what will become of the comparison they have tried so often to establish between Jesus and Buddha? The historical sciences finally, if sciences they be, have also taught us many things, but nothing of those which we expected from their progress. The great question is to know whether there exists a law of history, and in what measure we are enslaved to it. But that is exactly what we do not know, and what, it is to be feared we may add, we shall never know. If these are not bankruptcies all out, says M. Brunetière, they are, at least, partial failures—and it is easy to conceive how they have shaken the credit of science. We cannot tell, he adds, what may be the case in a hundred years, or in a thousand or two thousand, but for the present, and for a long time to come, reason is impotent to free itself from doubt. Neither science in general, nor its particular branches, physical or natural, philological or historical, can any longer claim, as they have for a hundred years, the government of the present life. The progress it had been thought to make—with M. Taine and in his traces—in soldering, to use his expression the moral to the natural sciences has not been a progress at all, but, on the contrary, a recoil. The situation is briefly summed up by

the writer:—Science has lost its *prestige* and religion has regained a portion of hers:

### THE POPE'S ACTION.

M. BRUNETIERE goes on to explain the action taken by the Pope in the face of this failure of science, of which he speaks. All religious re-action, he writes in effect, being first of profit to Catholicism—it is at least Renan who says so—it is not surprising that a politic Pope conceived the hope and formed the project of directing the movement. Other more pressing cares—and notably that of sustaining and repelling the assault of secular science—had preoccupied Leo XIII's predecessors. *Autres temps, autres soins!* Who would quit the communion of the Church to-day for philological reasons? And, on the other hand, if the impotence of physical or natural science to suppress mystery is proved, let us now go up again to the source. Let us invoke the spirit of conciliation and peace. Free and disengaged from the necessities of a struggle which had hitherto claimed all our activity, let us not prolong useless controversies—and, after having proved the truth or the divinity of religion by the continuity of its immutable dogma, let us prove it now by the good it can still do to this restless and troubled world. Such are the intentions which the writer attributes to the reigning Pope—all whose actions, as well as words, for 17 years, he says, seem to have tended to this great design. In proclaiming the independence of the Church with regard to forms of government, adds the writer, as well as in occupying himself, with a particularly active solicitude, with the labour question—and also in working to prepare, for a distant future, the reconciliation together of the different Christian communities, the Pope has done three great things—of which the first result has been to restore to Catholicism, and generally to religion, their part in social action. M. Brunetière quotes from various Papal utterances to prove and illustrate his argument. His conclusion is as follows:—If it is justly the honour of Christianity—if that was its strength at its outset—if, perhaps, it has given no more striking sign, nor convincing proof, of its mission, than to have addressed itself first to the humble ones of the world, there is also its future, and, so to speak, in the society that the philosophy of the last century has made for us, there is its promise of eternity. No Pontiff has felt this better than Pope Leo XIII, or, having felt it, has said it with more fulness of heart and warmth of persuasion. None, has repeated it with more insistence. And, above all, none in teaching those who are troubled by the uselessness of violence or revolt, and those who enjoy the good fortune of the day, how imperious and absolute their obligations towards their brethren are, has done so with a more lively sentiment of human brotherhood, of Christian equality, and apostolic liberty.

### RELIGION AND MORALITY.

M. BRUNETIERE then advocates the claims of the Christian religion, pleading the right of Catholicism to preference. Science cannot replace religion, he says, nor can religion oppose science. Each has its kingdom apart, and since it depends only on ourselves to become the subjects of the one or of the other, or of both at the same time, what mere can be required? With morality, however, it is different. The writer quotes from Edmond Scherer in support of his conviction that morals and religion are inseparable. Morality, wrote Scherer in 1884, has need of the absolute; it finds its basis only in God. "Conscience is like the heart: it needs a beyond. Duty is nothing if it is not sublime; and life becomes a frivolous thing if it does not imply eternal relations." "A moral system," he wrote again, "is nothing if it is not religious." M. Brunetière points out, as a proof of the truth of his assertion, that for the last two thousand years and up to the present century, every effort made to laissez or secularise morals has been only a deformation or an alteration or a disguise of some Christian idea. Everywhere he finds the Christian idea—in Bayle, in Faine, in Kant, in George Eliot—so true is it, he says, that we are impregnated with Christianity. The choice, therefore, to be made by those who do not think that a democracy can afford to be indifferent as to morals, and who recognise the strength still existing in religion, is that of the form of Christianity of which they can make the best use for the regeneration of morals. The writer gives, without hesitation, his own decision,

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