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THE INFLUENCE OF SCIENCE UPON LITERATURE.

By R. W. BOODLE.

Ever since Plato's days something like antagonism has existed between science and literature. Sometimes influencing one another, as in the present age, at other times one has reigned supreme to the exclusion of the other. So that, though one would suppose that there should not exist in the nature of things any antagonism between the *true* and the *beautiful*, there is still much truth in the old saying of Plato, "there is a quarrel of long standing between philosophy and poetry"—for philosophy occupied in his day the position now filled by what we term Science.

At the present moment science may be said to be definitely in the ascendancy. It threatens to exclude literature from the curriculum of schools. As the object lesson it claims precedence of the story book as a means of moulding the growing intellect of the child. Between two rival schools of historians, the one led by Professors Seeley and Stubbs, the other by Professor Bryce and appealing to the great names of Macaulay and Carlyle, a battle is being fought in our own days for the possession of the field of History; the new critical school aiming at converting History from a branch of Literature into a Science. In his recent "Recollections," Renan declares himself against the study of History upon any terms. "It is by chemistry at one end and by astronomy at the other, and especially by general physiology, that we really grasp the secret of existence of the world or of God, whichever it may be called. The one thing which I regret is having selected for my study researches of a nature which will never force themselves upon the world, or

be more than interesting dissertations upon a reality which has vanished for ever." Meanwhile Matthew Arnold urges that, when men "have duly taken in the proposition that their ancestor was a 'hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits,' there will be found to arise an invincible desire to relate this proposition to the sense within them for conduct and to the sense for beauty. But this the men of science will not do for us, and will hardly even profess to do."

Whatever may be the result of the rivalry between the two branches of knowledges, it is interesting to observe the curious influence that science has already exercised over literature. I propose to call attention to a few instances of this.

The professed object of science being the investigation of the laws of existence, the discovery of fact; the wider cultivation of science which marks our century should naturally result in bringing literature more strictly in accordance with the facts of nature. And this we find to be the case. The scientific spirit as it passed into literature is hardly disguised by the phrase "Truth to Nature," which has exercised such a potent influence upon fiction in prose and verse ever since the days of Wordsworth. In his epoch-making Preface to his "Lyrical Ballads," Wordsworth tells us the object he proposed to himself in the volume, viz., "to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and further and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature." And the spirit of which Wordsworth was the leading exponent has been the key-note of modern literature. To illustrate this in detail would be unnecessary. Let the reader, if he wishes to satisfy himself, compare the impromptu songs in "The Spanish Gypsy" with similar songs in earlier literature. The difference is striking. George Eliot's songs are such as a minstrel might possibly improvise. Those