

CURRENT LITERATURE.

PROFESSOR HUXLEY takes occasion, in the *Fortnightly*, to express again the favourable estimate he has formed of Descartes as a biologist. It is the fashion with the prevailing school of philosophy to undervalue the services rendered by the French thinker to more than one department of human knowledge. When his name is mentioned it is always to link it with the untenable theory of "vortices." The article "On the Hypothesis that Animals are Automata" appears to have been written with two objects in view: first to vindicate the reputation of Descartes, and secondly to point out such modifications of his biological theories as modern scientific discovery suggests. On the former point we may quote a sentence:—Descartes "took an undisputed place not only among the chiefs of philosophy, but amongst the greatest and most original of mathematicians; while, in my belief, he is no less certainly entitled to the rank of a great and original physiologist: inasmuch as he did for the physiology of motion and sensation that which Harvey had done for the circulation of the blood, and opened up that road to the mechanical theory of these processes which has been followed by all his successors. Descartes was no speculator, as some would have us believe; but a man who knew of his own knowledge what was to be known of the facts of anatomy and physiology in his day." Prof. Huxley then states, in a series of propositions, the views of modern physiologists on motion and sensation, and proves that Descartes originated those views by citations from his works. The philosopher held that the lower animals are *unconscious* automata, whereas the professor regards them as *conscious* automata. A very curious case is that of a French sergeant who at intervals of fifteen or thirty days lost apparently all his senses except that of touch, and all consciousness and power of will, for hours and yet ate, drank, smoked and walked about as usual. The paper concludes with a repudiation of the charges of fatalism, materialism and atheism made against him, and quotes orthodox authorities from St. Augustine to Leibnitz and Jonathan Edwards as holding similar views.

Mr. Grant Duff publishes an address delivered before the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh in reply to the Cassandra forebodings of Mr. Greg. From the nature of this contribution to the controversy it would be impossible to give a summary of

it here. It is certainly written with a clearness and vigour of expression which often approach eloquence. We may observe that whilst Mr. Grant Duff contends that Christianity is gaining instead of losing ground, he is very careful not to pin his faith to any existing dogmatic system. He thinks that when we are satisfied that any of our old beliefs will not stand the test of modern research, we are bound manfully to revise or, if need be, to discard them. As for the attitude of religion towards science he shall speak in his own words:—"The worst anti-christs of our day are the bungling sophists who denounce science and historical criticism, because they do not square with the vile little systems which they, and others like them, who have built on those immortal words—who yelp at our modern masters of those who know—our Darwins, our Huxleys and Tyndalls, as if these were not doing in their own way the work of God in the world as much as even those who have in our times most perfectly echoed those divine words."

Prof. Beesly concludes his essay on the "Third French Republic," taking as his motto a sentence from Comte, which, being translated, reads thus:—"The union of republican Conservatives with Conservative republicans ought soon to deliver the West from the yoke of retrogressive demagogues and that of demagogic re-actionists (*rétrogrades*)."

If anything comprehensible can be made out of this jingle of words it is certainly not the meaning Prof. Beesly would convey by it. Comte and he are wide as the poles asunder in political opinion, and therefore a quotation like this is misleading. Conservative republicanism was not the writer's first love, and even yet he cannot refrain from setting up Danton and Gambetta as idols for popular worship. M. Thiers is "damned with faint praise" and then abused for resigning the presidency in a pet. The yoke of McMahon and the crooked stratagems of De Broglie are no doubt intolerable, but they must be endured, because Prof. Beesly's model statesman Gambetta chose by joining the Extreme Right to leap out of the frying-pan into the fire. The impetuous blood of the Frenchman has been cooled of late, but whether his return to moderate measures be the result of conviction, repentance or despair, does not yet appear. The Professor is very anxious to prove that France is at last seriously and unchangeably republican. We wish we could think so, because we