

BRUNETIÈRE
AND
THE 'MONSTER BANQUET'



By Elton Hocking

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F. Brunetière

BRUNETIÈRE

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Brunetière and the 'monster banquet'.

At Meudon,—where he was not born, where he did not die, where perhaps he never even lived,—a plaster bust of François Rabelais was dedicated last year. I scarcely need to add that on that occasion there was the customary speech-making and banqueting. Such is our French manner of honoring our great men, and especially our great writers: they have thought for us, and we eat for them. Did I not read in the papers that they would eat again this month, and a year from now,—in short, that a society had been formed to eat every year in honor of Rabelais? Just as there was already an eating society in honor of Molière, which met every winter at Paris to devour choice morsels, similarly the Meudon group will meet every spring and eat in honor of Rabelais, food of a more rustic nature, no doubt. ... If it is the privilege of the Molierists to display a somewhat fastidious taste and thus to imitate their idol, who lived by regimen, the Rabelaisians doubtless are less squeamish, robust enough to stomach the crudest fare.¹

SO FAR AS IS known, no societies have ever been formed for the purpose of eating in honor of Ferdinand Brunetière, the writer of these lines of pleasant banter. A few years after writing them, however, he was nevertheless the occasion of a monster banquet.

One evening in April, 1895, some eight hundred guests thronged the banquet hall of Saint-Mandé in order to eat and drink to the honor of science and Marcelin Berthelot, and to the dishonor of Ferdinand Brunetière. *Conspuer Brunetière!*—that was the order of the day. There were speeches by Brisson, Poincaré, Berthelot, Zola, Claretie and other luminaries less remembered today. There were scores of celebrities from the various divisions of the Institut, from the Academy of Medicine, the Sorbonne, the Collège de France, the Museum, the Observatory; there were political leaders of State and city government; there were artists, poets, novelists, journalists; there were leaders of the social world, and noisy delegations of students. All Paris was there,—the *tout* Paris of 1895,—to offer toasts and libations to science, and to attest its beneficence by simultaneous ingurgitation of food and philosophy.

But most of all, this banquet was held as a demonstration of protest against Brunetière. Three months before, he had dared to publish in his *Revue des deux mondes* an article which denounced the positivistic and materialistic spirit of modern science, and proclaimed that morality and happiness were to be found not in science, but in the spirit of the Church.

"What followed was more than a scandal; it was an insurrection," wrote a contemporary.² The Paris newspapers carried daily discussions of the article. Berthelot, Richet and others retaliated in the name of science. Mgr. d'Hulst, Rector of the Institut Catholique in Paris, attacked Brunetière in the name of the Church. The serious

¹ F. Brunetière, *Questions de critique*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1889, 2e édition, pp. 1-2. (Will be designated *infra* as QC.)

² L. Richard, *F. Brunetière*, Paris, Sansot, 1905, p. 40.

periodicals, whether their complexion was philosophical, literary, scientific, or religious, joined in the controversy. Brunetière himself received countless letters from individuals, some of whom approved his attitude. In general, however, there was a chorus of denunciation, for Science, "the new idol," was still worshipped blindly. To question its omnipotence and its beneficence, in whatever realm, was treason. To maintain that religion was not superseded by science was rank heresy. What was worst of all was that the traitor and heretic should be Brunetière. During the twenty years of his brilliant public career he had been frankly a rationalist, positivist, Darwinian.³ He had openly professed his repugnance to any form of mysticism. The friend and admiring follower of Taine and Renan, he had never seriously questioned their doctrines and influence. And now, just after their death, they were repudiated by Brunetière, who by common consent had succeeded to their role as intellectual leader of the age. Eminent professor at the Sorbonne and Ecole Normale, Academician, editor of the most authoritative periodical, acknowledged successor of Sainte-Beuve and Taine in literary criticism, and the most brilliant orator in France, Brunetière was indeed a great influence upon public opinion. His ringing proclamation made him a renegade of the first magnitude. Hence the jeers, the cheers, the three months of scandal and uproar, and finally, the banquet. "A man would not feel himself to be alive if he had no enemies," was his characteristic comment.⁴ Always sufficiently alive in this sense, the pugnacious critic and philosopher now found himself revived a hundredfold. If one applied here the "Unanimist" theory of Jules Romains one might say that the personality of Brunetière attained the maximum of its potentialities during those early months of 1895, when the searching light of French intellect was focussed upon him. Whatever opinion one may hold of his ideas at that time, it is certain that this storm of controversy testified to the enormous influence which he commanded, and which is largely forgotten today.

His personality and character have been generally misunderstood and misrepresented. His pugnacity is obvious, but it is too often overlooked that he fought not against persons, but against influences; not for his friends, but for ideas whose supporters were therefore his friends. His sincerity has never been questioned, but certain of his more paradoxical statements have been dismissed with a smile and the word, "*boutade*." Thus, for example, the proclamation of his own objectivity, addressed sternly to another critic: "You always praise what you like; I never do."⁵ The word "never" is, of course, an exaggeration, but the phrase becomes significant when we know that he used his influence to secure publication of the *Thaïs* of Anatole France. Anyone who is familiar with Brunetière knows that *Thaïs* could not appeal to him personally, but as a critic he felt convinced that it had high artistic value. For him, this was conclusive.

The same disinterested devotion to merit impelled him to befriend Paul Hervieu. When still a young subaltern at the *Revue des deux mondes* he read the manuscript of

³ Late in the year 1894, even while Brunetière was making his momentous journey to Rome, his intimate friend and colleague Victor Giraud wrote: "M. Brunetière will probably never be a believer." M. Giraud has loyally declined to delete the phrase from later editions. (V. Giraud, *les Maîtres d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui*, Paris Hachette, 1912, p. 201. Will be designated *infra* as MAA.)

⁴ In his *Discours de combat*, Paris, Perrin, vol. II (1903), p. 166. (Will be designated *infra* as DC.)

⁵ This anecdote is related by J. Lemaître, *les Contemporains*, Paris, Lecène et Oudin 1896, vol. VI, préface, p. 11.

Hervieu's *Inconnu*, and accepted it for publication. He was so convinced of its merit that when his decision was overruled, he made an issue of the matter, announcing that the novel should be accepted, or he would resign. It was not until long afterward that Hervieu learned of the incident, and then only in a roundabout manner.

In this country he is little read, and liked still less. It is unfortunate that he is generally known only as the author of *le Roman naturaliste* which, though assuredly one of his best books, is hardly representative of its writer. Written early in its author's career, it suffers from the excesses of youth. Its ferocity of tone, intransigent Classicism, and brutal massacre of certain third-rate writers, all serve to put its author in an unattractive light.

In the case of Brunetière, it should be emphatically stated that the style was *not* the man. His associates all agree that behind his gruffness and imperious manner he concealed a sensitive, timid nature and a tender heart.

Six months before his death, when he was already feeble, short of breath, scarcely able to walk, I frequently saw him climb the three long stairways of a hospital to visit a sick friend. And how many similar instances could be cited!⁶

In short, he was a *bourru bienfaisant*, and his bitter pessimism was only the disillusioned accompaniment of his uncompromising idealism. At intimate dinners he frequently brightened (for he was something of an epicure!), and then,—especially if there were women present,—he would display a brilliance of wit and repartee that amazed those who had met him only professionally. He showed great fondness for puns, and his sparkling conversation, especially if directed upon contemporary literature, was a rare treat for all the guests. On one occasion he had executed a number of writers with consummate skill, and his hostess commented, smiling:

"M. Brunetière, you can pride yourself on being a great despot!"

"No, madam," he replied gaily, "I am not a despot, but I don't like to have people disagree with me."⁷

His physique was delicate, and he was extremely nervous. An incessant smoker, he would not put his cigarette aside even to have his photograph taken. Like Balzac, he worked constantly under great pressure, promising more books and articles than any man could possibly write, and working most of the night in an effort to maintain his superhuman schedule. Thus his constitutional nervousness and irritability were aggravated, for the meagre capital of his physical resources was squandered lavishly, and the reckless speculator was constantly mortgaging his future. These were loans that he could not repay, as he well knew, and his friends despaired of making him mend his ways.

⁶ V. Giraud, MAA. 222.

⁷ T. Delmont, *Ferdinand Brunetière*, Paris, P. Lethielleux, [n.d.], p. 49.

"My friend," Count d'Haussonville protested, "the life that you are leading is a wager, and you are going to lose it."

"What of it?" retorted Brunetière disdainfully. "What is life, after all, and what is the use of prolonging it, if to do so prevents one from using it?"⁸

He was literally incapable of rest, and when his physician occasionally prevailed upon him to go to the country, it meant merely a change of scene for his intense activity.

"I am writing from Arcachon, where I am supposed to be resting," he wrote to a friend, "and this is my twelfth letter today."⁹ During one such "vacation" he wrote two hundred and seventy-five letters. Many articles were written at the seashore, and a steady influx of books from Paris fed his feverish desire to "keep up" in all branches of contemporary thought.

This hectic activity produced about forty volumes in a career of thirty years, and scores of articles and countless lectures.¹⁰ When we reflect that all this was done in addition to his duties as editor and professor, it is little wonder that his writings seem habitually to be overwrought and aggressive. They are the product of sheer nervous energy and indomitable will.

His only dissipations seem to have been choice food and rare books. He confesses somewhere that he cannot enjoy a Classic writer unless he reads him in a fine old first edition. He was a familiar figure at sales of books, and built up a choice library of twelve thousand volumes in which he took great pride. Here he entertained his friends, and an anecdote seems to imply that he estimated their nocturnal endurance to be as great as his own.

His friends are indebted to him for unforgettable literary joys. For example, M. Victor du Bled writes: "I dined with him one evening with MM. Dastre and Robert de Bonnières. During the dinner, the conversation turned to the lyric poets of the nineteenth century. Scarcely had we left the table (his dinners were superb, and Mme. Brunetière certainly prolonged his life several years by her intelligent and practical devotion), when Brunetière conducts us into the library,—very complete, with many rare books,—takes down a dozen volumes of Hugo, Lamartine, Musset, Vigny, Leconte de Lisle, Sully-Prudhomme, Heredia, and begins to read us the poems that he loves best, with commentaries and comparisons worthy of the poets. ...

"We were spellbound, listening, interrupting from time to time to ask for favorite passages. Our host had begun at nine o'clock; at 3:00 A.M. he took down two volumes of another great poet, Bossuet, passed in review twenty-five pages before our eyes, and then closed the book saying: That Bossuet is such a fine

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹ V. Giraud, MAA, 210.

¹⁰ In 1893 he estimated that his unpublished lectures at the Ecole Normale would fill twenty or twenty-five volumes. (Cf. V. Giraud. Brunetière, Paris, Flammarion [c. 1932] p. 90 n.)

fellow! Then we departed at 4:00 A.M."¹¹

Those who were not his intimates never really knew the man, for he was very reserved to mere acquaintances. This fact, coupled with the asperity of his written style, has given rise to the legend of the heartless and crotchety autocrat. It is true that certain of his acts, especially in his last years, have lent credence to this conception.

His attitude in the Dreyfus affair is doubtless the most irritating phase of his long activity. Yet even this is an expression of his devotion to an idea. For him it was a matter of the social order *versus* individual license. A study of his newspaper articles reveals that he had no objection to a new trial, but that he objected to the arrogance of Zola and the "Intellectuals" who were, as Brunetière thought, doing their best to foment a revolt against two of the bases of society,—the army and the courts. It should be added that intuitively he felt certain that Dreyfus was guilty. Finally there is one fact which has not been made clear, and which is much to the credit of the critic. At all times he protested against the wave of anti-Semitism which was so involved with the whole "Affair." Such intolerance he denounced as akin to the spirit of slavery or the Inquisition, and he conjured Edouard Drumont and his factionaries not to cast away the spirit of tolerance which is one of the great heritages of modern civilization.

Brunetière was of a violent nature, and he assuredly felt very strongly about the "Affair"; yet the bitterness of feeling which divided the whole nation, and which disrupted life-long friendships and even families, left no rancor in his heart. Hervieu had taken the opposite side to that which Brunetière espoused; nevertheless the critic used all his influence, which was considerable, in a successful effort to have his opponent elected to the Academy. Thus, in the very heat of battle, this doctrinaire, this imperious dictator in the world of ideas, could yet distinguish between Hervieu the artist and Hervieu the political polemist, and by doing so, justified in a measure his claim to objectivity.

The insistence upon the ability to bisect oneself, to abstract the purely intellectual processes of the mind from the affective impulses of the heart, stamps him as a Kantian rationalist, far removed from the Naturalistic materialism of his own age. It is by the power of pure reason that he postulates the impersonality of his own criticism, for as he believes, reason is impersonal and universal, one *likes* what seems affecting or appealing to one personally, whereas one *admires* and *judgets* by the intellect alone. By the same principle, criticism should not vary, in essence, from one critic to another; it should attain, as far as possible, the impersonality and universality of reason itself.

This intellectual approach goes far to explain many of his attitudes, in literature and elsewhere. The finest poetry is metaphysical, he tells us,¹² and poetry he considers the highest form of literary art. Tragedy is a higher form than comedy, for it implies a judgment of life. The comedy of character he considers superior to the comedy of intrigue, because of its greater significance, and in general, his whole hierarchy of the

¹¹ T. Delmont, *op. Cit.*, 50-51.

¹² Cf. *l'Evolution de la poésie lyrique en France au dix-neuvième siècle*, Paris Hachette. 1895, 2e édition, vol. II, pp. 253, 277; vol. I, p. 131. (Will be designated *infra* as EPL.)

genres is elaborated by virtue of this same principle. It is the Classical canon of universality, interpreted with a new breadth and originality by a modern French rationalist.

It is a mistake, however, to accept the superficial view of the majority of historians and critics, who note Brunetière's Classical sympathies, his admiration for Pascal and Bossuet, and conclude that he had a "seventeenth-century soul." The Classical traits are obvious, and need not be dwelt upon; what has been little noted, and analyzed still less, is the emotional fibre of the man. Determined rationalist though he was, he yet had his passions, loves, hates; it is even likely that his frenzied intellectualism was in no small measure a willful effort to subordinate his *alter ego*. In short, his life offers another example of that age-old struggle between the head and the heart, and his variations, contradictions, and finally the reactionary attitude of his last years can only be explained by the inner struggle of these two sides of the man.

As a youth he was willful, ambitious, romantic. His brother tells us that the future Classicist was intensely devoted to the Romantic poets, and that at home he would passionately declaim long tirades from Musset. A serious and brilliant student withal, he received excellent *instruction* at school, and a thorough-going, but severe Christian *éducation* at home. His father, a former student at the Ecole Polytechnique, became a high-ranking officer in the Marine service, and one wonders whether the future dictator of French letters inherited his imperious temper and lust for authority from his father, whose family had for generations numbered many officers in the army and navy.¹³

The social position of the family was high, the father being "fifth or sixth of the official personages of Toulon," we are told by Charles Brunetière, indignantly refuting the legend that his illustrious brother had to overcome the handicap of very humble beginnings. Ferdinand Brunetière was born at Toulon (1849), but it was only a short time until the father's duties caused the removal of the family to Brest, thence to Lorient, and finally back to Toulon in 1861. It was at the *lycée* of Marseilles, however, where he enrolled as an *interne*, that most of the boy's schooling was obtained. Despite this, he was no *méridional* (as some historians have alleged), for his parents were both, by long ancestry, of pure Vendée stock. These atavisms, his brother Charles asserts, account for the future critic's pure traditionalism. A cautious reader might take notice of this statement only to infer that bold hypotheses of a pseudo-scientific nature were a family trait.

At all events, family influences were not permanent, for at the age of eighteen the young prodigy refused to follow his father's wish that he prepare for the Civil Service, insisting that he would be a man of letters. The dispute was settled by compromise when it was agreed that the boy should prepare for the Ecole Normale. The family removed to

¹³ His brother Charles also became an army officer. It is to him that we are indebted for the few details which we know of the critic's youth. (C. Brunetière, *Une correspondance inédite de Ferdinand Brunetière*, Vannes, Lafolye, 1910, preface.) In his recent book on Brunetière, M. Giraud acknowledges, as being specially written for him, *Souvenirs sur la famille, l'enfance et l'adolescence de F. Brunetière*, by Charles Brunetière. (V. Giraud, *Brunetière*, p. 12 n.)

Paris, where they allowed him considerable liberty. It would seem that the sudden change from the strict discipline of his provincial *internat*, to the freedom of the Parisian student in those clays of the waning Empire, somewhat upset the balance of this self-confident youth. Supremely certain of his superior abilities, he neglected his classes and the authors of the program, for reading that better pleased his fancy. He spent long days wandering in the Louvre, and his evenings in the *claque* of the Comédie-Française, for money was scarce and he was passionately fond of the theater. He attended Taine's lectures, and his mind was fired by the lecturer's boldly speculative thinking. He was dazzled by the brilliance of Renan's alluring magic. These two great master intellects, the molders and the spokesmen of their age, had reached the apogee of their prestige. The enthusiasm of their youthful pioneering had yielded to the quiet confidence that follows in the wake of proved achievement. Accepted, acclaimed, inspired by public faith and approbation, they were the chosen leaders of their age, the prophets of an era just beginning.

Less close to the public mind were the great specialists Claude Bernard, Berthelot, Pasteur, and abroad there were Darwin, Spencer, Haeckel, Strauss. Pell-mell, without attempt to classify or distinguish, the public mind associated the most famous names in the fields of the physical and natural sciences, history, philosophy, sociology, Biblical exegesis. What mattered fine distinctions? According to Renan himself, all these branches of activity were but subdivisions of Science, which was about to "organize humanity," and would presently "organize God."¹⁴

The reign of egoism had come. ... And there was a simultaneous invasion of positivism in thought, of naturalism in art, of mechanism and analysis in criticism, of realism and arrogance in literature, of agnosticism and indifference in religion, of the practical sense in life.¹⁵

Taine and Renan agreed generally with Herbert Spencer, who supported Darwin. The latter was praised by Strauss, and he in turn was a devout admirer of Bismarck, a master of the "positive religion."¹⁶ An invisible chain bound them all together. Meanwhile Taine spoke of "soldering" the moral sciences to the physical sciences, and was in search of the "master formula."

This frenzied intellectualism, and the surging confidence which sustained it, could not fail to affect the eager youth just arrived from Marseilles. He was caught by the *Zeitgeist*, thrilled at the prospect that he might be a leader in the new age which was about to dawn,—the age of Science. On the altar of the New Idol he burned the gods of his fathers, and then set about the task of perfecting himself in the new wisdom. Endowed with a keen mind, a prodigious memory,¹⁷ tireless curiosity, and the determination to

¹⁴ E. Renan. *l'Avenir de la science*, Paris. Calmann-Lévy, 1890. 2e édition, p. 37.

¹⁵ P. Desjardins, "M. E. Melchior de Vogüé," *Revue bleue*, June 8. 1889. 3e série, tome XVII, p. 714.

¹⁶ The phrase, and the enumeration, are taken from P. Desjardins, *idem*.

¹⁷ "He had a memory comparable to that of Macaulay ... or Villemain", according to Victor du Bled. ... "Let me relate one of many instances. I was walking with him one day on the Rue du Bac when we met Edouard Rod. ... 'I have read your article in yesterday's *Débats*,' said Brunetière. 'It is very good, but I have twenty-two objections to make.'"

"Twenty-two!" gasped Rod in amazement. "That's impossible!"

make a name for himself, he read omnivorously in all the branches of contemporary thought, from history and archaeology to metaphysics and Biblical exegesis. Within the compass of a few years he acquired a breadth and solidity of information that can be termed nothing less than amazing. He is the last of those bold, roving, nineteenth-century intellects which took all knowledge for their province, and whose history is the very record of the *Zeitgeist*. Especially is he representative, in his maturer years, of the metaphysical struggles and moral unrest of his age. Like his masters Taine and Renan, he grasped at science as the one firm reality in a world of phenomenal flux. His life, like theirs, may be considered a search for the solution of the problem of values. And his solution, different from theirs, is subsequent, and equally significant, in so far as it is typical of a considerable portion of his generation.

In 1869, however, the resolute young positivist met reverses. His rambles in the art museums, his evenings in the *claque*, and his wide reading in contemporary science had not left much time for the rigid requirements of the *programme*, and he failed to pass his examination for the *licence*. The same year he was denied admission to the Ecole Normale. He was a brilliant student in those subjects which appealed to him, such as philosophy, history, Latin and French composition, but he declined to study what he did not like, notably Greek composition, and it was this which caused his failures.

The war intervening, young Brunetière enlisted, though officially exempt because of poor eyesight. Possibly his eagerness to share in military duty then, as well as his intense nationalism at all times, was caused in part by the influence of his father, and the family tradition of several generations. He saw active service throughout the bitterly disheartening months of the siege of Paris. This national catastrophe made an indelible impression on the mind of the young critic-to-be.

A decisive influence ... was that of the events of 1870. I believe it is impossible to exaggerate its importance. Jules Lemaître recently observed that to have seen, or not to have seen the war created a veritable difference of mentality between Frenchmen. The statement is penetrating and exact, and to no one is it more applicable than to Ferdinand Brunetière. He had seen the war, having done his duty, and more than his duty as a soldier, during the siege of Paris; he had witnessed the anarchical convulsions of the Commune. There is no doubt that this grievous national experience left him, as so many others, with somber memories and inconsolable regrets,—more than that, with the passionate desire and the indefectible hope for a France united, disciplined and confident, as of old, in its glorious traditions. ... Patriotism was one of the mainsprings of Brunetière's moral personality,—a patriotism the more vibrant and uneasy because alarmed and humbled in its youthful pride.¹⁸

"'Quite possible, and here they are,' retorted Brunetière, and he began. At the ninth and at the thirteenth we are interrupted by passers-by who ask their way. Brunetière directs them, then continues his enumeration. At number seventeen, Rod is convinced, and asks for quarter." (T. Delmont, *op. Cit.*, 38, 39.)

¹⁸ V. Giraud, *les Maîtres de l'heure*, Paris, Hachette, 1912, 3e édition, vol. I, p. 62. (Will be designated *infra* as MH.)

This testimony is confirmed by Charles Brunetière. He tells us that his brother was extremely shocked and depressed at the outcome of the war, and considered it the downfall of the traditional order. Therefore, his sadness, disillusion, loss of faith in the social order.

It heightened his youthful independence, and increased even to the point of presumption, perhaps, his confidence in his own abilities. Since society is powerless, bankrupt and dying, he who has the will to live must make his way without society. And thus it was that deserting the beaten path which leads through the Ecole Normale ... he decided to depend only on his own resources to attain the realization of his ambitions.¹⁹ Then began for him the period of difficulties, which soon became also the period of his return to moderation. In 1875, in his first contact with the public, he rebuked writers who were disposed to disregard the "eternal rules of art" ... and so if he had, as a certain critic says, "verged on intellectual anarchy," the crisis had not been long.²⁰

It is easy to understand why he did not care to return to "the beaten path which leads through the Ecole Normale." When he had first come to the *lycée* at Paris, he had been older than his classmates. To return there now as a repeater, two years older, and after his experiences as a soldier, would have been too painful a humiliation for his haughty, sensitive nature. Moreover, he had no more desire now than before to perfect himself in Greek. Indeed his antipathy for all things Greek seemed almost an obsession. But most of all, he was eager to begin his career. His academic failures had served only to whet his ambition, and his immediate reaction was to strike out for himself, and show the world what he could do.

Meanwhile he had to earn his daily bread. He obtained a position as tutor in a *boîte à bachots*, an institution which impounds recalcitrant *lycéens* and, by dint of enforced intellectual feeding and judicious exercise, prepares these young men for the *baccalauréat*. Brunetière met his former classmate, Paul Bourget, also teaching here, who has left us an interesting account of the strenuous regime which Brunetière imposed upon himself during these years of preparation. For one hundred and fifty francs per month, he spent the entire day from 8:30 on, lecturing to his young students, correcting their compositions, and preparing, with the conscientiousness which was characteristic of him, the sundry lessons which he was called upon to teach,—Greek and Latin composition, mathematics, philosophy, history, English, physics. Despite the effort required for such a program, he found the energy and time necessary for his own studies. Six days a week his time was due to the *pension*; his days were sold, but the nights remained his own, and he

¹⁹ This is probably a diplomatic way of saying that he persisted in his determination to abandon his academic studies, despite the fact that his father cut off his allowance. It is known that, shortly after the war, he broke with his family. In the spring of 1871 he had, at his parents' behest, begun the study of law at Rennes. Three months later he unexpectedly dispatched them a curt note: "Unable to live here any longer. I am leaving for Paris, where I shall try to find the means to work according to my tastes." (V. Giraud *Brunetière*, p. 33.)

Thus began his "apprentice years" of privation and independent efforts.
²⁰ C. Brunetière, *op. cit.*, preface, p. 7.

utilized them. Says Bourget:

His veritable life was not that of the teacher, it was that of the student which he became each evening, when, alone at his desk, surrounded by his books, he began to "work" after having "drudged," as he expressed it. The hours would pass by. Midnight would strike. Two o'clock. Four o'clock. He was so absorbed by his thoughts that often he did not notice that his lamp was growing pale with the arrival of dawn.²¹

For five years he maintained this program,—a physical and intellectual *tour de force* which illustrates more eloquently than could any commentary the moral probity and iron will of the young critic-to-be. The self-imposed program of study was surprisingly varied.

In his library the works of the great writers of the age of Louis XIV rubbed elbows with the books of the most recent philosophers and sociologists, and he would move from the *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* to the *Origin of Species*, from Descartes to Auguste Comte, with a disconcerting rapidity for the prejudices of 1875. ... This period of preparation stays in my mind as one of the fine human spectacles which I have witnessed.²²

He soon began to make his way. The *Revue bleue* engaged him in 1874 to write reviews of new books in various fields. His work was so competent that he was soon allowed to branch out into more original articles. The wide range of interests and thorough study attested by M. Bourget are evident in these early articles. He shows remarkable familiarity with such erudite and divergent subjects as Oriental history, comparative mythology, Assyrian epigraphy, history of religions, prehistoric archaeology, the evolutions of philosophy from the Greeks down to contemporary writers, anthropology and geology, sociology, contemporary science and history. When one reflects that most of these articles, and the preparation required for them, were done in those long night vigils after a busy day in the private school, one is inclined to share the admiration of M. Bourget.

The maturity of this early work shows that the young critic had outgrown his exuberant Romanticism, truculent individualism, and most of his enthusiasm. A recent writer²³ has spoken of him as "prematurely old." It is well said, and in view of the hardships and bitter disappointments suffered by this sensitive, ambitious youth during his first years in Paris, it is easy to understand. In his earliest published work one finds the disillusioned sobriety, the hard pessimism, the acrid irony which remained his characteristics, and which suggested to the reader that he was an old man.

Such an impression was heightened by the style which was so old-fashioned as to

²¹ P. Bout-Ret, *Pages de critique et de doctrine*, Paris, Plon-Nourrit, 1912. vol. I. p 286

²² *Ibid.*, 288. 289.

²³ J. Bertaut in *Vingt-cinq arts de littérature française*, Publié sous la direction de M. Eugene Montfort, Paris, Librairie de France, [n.d.]. vol. I, p. 244.

seem a pedantic anachronism. His sentences were the long periods of Bossuet, strangely commingled with the scientific terminology of Darwin and Claude Bernard. Sharply contrasting judgments have been made upon the quality and effectiveness of this style. Doubtless it is one of those subjective questions which must be decided by the individual reader, but it seems certain that it was the natural, unaffected expression of its writer. His brother Charles raises the question as to whether this style was natural or acquired, and answers that in his opinion it was instinctive, but that if it was acquired, it had become so habitual as to be a second nature. He says that even the intimate letters of the critic always employed those measured, multipartite periods so well known to the public, so that "it surely seems that their oratorical tone was merely the expression of the author's thought."²⁴

Charles Brunetière reproduces, as an amusing example of this, a note found among the papers of the critic after his death, and which was jotted down one summer day in 1873, when the young critic (aged 24) was spending his vacation in Brittany:

Achévé de lire la Conquête de l'Angleterre par les Normands,
qu'hier encore j'aurais peut-être, sur la foi des souvenirs de collège,
admiration sans réserve.²⁵

Jules Claretie remarked,²⁶ in a public meeting of the Academy: "I once heard him order the menu of a banquet for the Press Association with the same care, the same eloquence that he would have employed for a new edition of Bossuet."

The testimony of M. Léon Daudet confirms our belief in Brunetière's naturalness in unnatural expression. He relates that one day the critic came home and learned that Mme. Brunetière, who was rather hard to please, had again discharged her cook. Thereupon the erudite husband expostulated:²⁷ "Si vous les gourmandez toutes ainsi, ma chère, vous n'en trouverez seulement point une!"

This academic, essentially rhetorical manner found its proper place and greatest effectiveness in his lectures, which began in 1886 with his appointment to the Ecole Normale. Gifted with a fine deep voice, he accentuated and detached so perfectly each phrase of his "periods" which rolled forth so long, so involved, so complicated with their coordinate and subordinate members, their relative clauses, and even,—and this is not an easy matter,—their parenthetical interpolations, that the freshmen of the Ecole Normale, amazed at such verbal flights of oratory and convinced that the flyer could not possibly, in view of the difficulties involved, make his prodigious sentence "come out," as the phrase goes,—these young students, I say, used to offer wagers that the speaker could never, within the rules of syntax, straighten out his figures and make a safe return to earth, but their wagers were always taken up by the older students who confidently and

²⁴ C. Brunetière, *op. cit.*, preface, p. 1.

²⁵ *Idem.*

²⁶ *Recueil des discours. Rapports et pièces diverses lus dans les séances publiques et particulières de l'Académie Française, 1900-1909, 2e partie*, Paris, Firmin Didot, 1910, p. 460.

²⁷ L. Daudet, *Etudes et milieux littéraires*, Paris, Grasset, 1927, p. 242.

admiringly watched their pilot progress through the air, circle once or twice to get his bearings, then settle to an even, perfect landing.

Striking and impressive though his style may have been, his opinions were more important. His early articles show him to be a genuine rationalist and positivist, deeply impressed by the promises of "Science" as it was then understood, but with a defeatist sense of the emptiness left by the loss of his Christian faith which his dwindling faith in Science could not entirely replace. Essentially serious by nature, and profoundly affected by the national humiliation of 1870-71, he could not turn his back upon "the only problems whose solution is important," to use his phrase, nor could he mock at them with the complacent irony of his master Renan. Hence, his pessimism. Some years later, but long before he joined the Church again, he delivered a very curious lecture upon "les Causes du pessimisme," far more personal than was customary with him. He said in part:

The history of civilization ... is nothing more than the history of the efforts of humanity to rise above that animality which is our basic nature. ... all the progress of science, about which some of us are so vain, serves, in all truth, only to convince us more profoundly of our ignorance. A score of problems which the ancient philosophers ... thought they could solve, because they did not know the causes, we know today that we shall never solve. ... Whence do we come? What is our nature? What is our destination? Concerning these problems, and many others which depend on them, we are exactly as far advanced as men were in the time of Aristotle or Kapila, except that they flattered themselves that they could answer them, and we know that we cannot. If I needed to, I could prove that we cannot. We are as it were enveloped on all sides by a heavy shadow which it would be vain for us to try to pierce, and wisdom consists in not trying to penetrate the mystery which is impenetrable. I scarcely need to remind you that positivism is founded wholly on this fact.

Then he goes on to speak of those who cannot be satisfied to know that they cannot know, and who are therefore tortured by metaphysical doubts:

Would you reply that this cause of pessimism can act only on a superior intelligence, upon subtle and superior minds? I wish it were true, for then I should be numbered among them. But it would be a great mistake. For these problems ... are the only ones whose solution is important, and to every one of us, for the very reason that we are men.²⁸

This lecture, delivered in 1886, betrays an appreciable lessening of his acceptance of positivism, but it shows the orientation of his thought. For a score of years he continued to put hope in science and, like Auguste Comte, to trust in the altruism of mankind. Mingled with all this, one finds the rationalist's keen displeasure with all forms of mysticism, and especially the renegade's disdain of Christianity. Writing in 1876 on "l'Evolution du transformisme," he ranks Haeckel's *Natural History of Creation* above

²⁸ Reproduced in *Revue bleue*, Jan. 30. 1886, 3e série, tome XI, pp. 139, 141, 142.

anything written by Darwin, and he adds enthusiastically,²⁹ "In this resume of history, the wretchedness of our origins and the grandeur of our destiny appear more clearly than in any lesson of the old theology."

His belief in the opposition of science and religion is more fully expressed in another early article, in which he shows himself to be thoroughly imbued with the historical spirit. After going out of his way to say that "the Catholic convictions of M. Lenormant cannot always be reconciled with the data of science," he speaks admiringly of the *genius* of de Sacy, Champollion and Burnouf, looks forward hopefully to the establishment of "the science of religions, based upon history and especially on geography," finds a vestige of primitive polytheism in the Catholic worship of the saints, speaks more respectfully of Buddhism,³⁰ and then continues:

But monotheism itself ... as in Christianity, for example, does not give us the highest and the most complete idea of God to which the human mind can attain. More than that, as a metaphysical solution of the problem of the relation of man to nature and to God, it implies a manifest contradiction. Finally, let me add that it opposes science as an insurmountable barrier. ... This is because monotheism, if it remain consistent with itself, excludes all eagerness to know, and any search for causes. Preoccupied as it is with divine grandeur and omnipotence, resolving all problems and settling all revolts with a single word, it is not far from considering scientific curiosity, independently of its results, as a sort of sacrilegious ardor and, as it were, an outrageous assault upon the mystery in which God is pleased to envelop his designs. ...

Christian metaphysics is satisfied to oppose the two terms [*finite* and *infinite*] and answers its adversaries through the mouth of its most illustrious doctors, "*Credo quia absurdum*". ... Unfortunately, metaphysics ... has long since reconciled the antithesis, and found in pantheism a solution far more easily admissible than the strictly monotheistic solution.³¹

This is reminiscent of Voltaire, as well as of Burnouf and Renan. His faith in historical science and in the powers of metaphysics is revealed here to be far greater than it was ten years later (1886), in his lecture on "les Causes du pessimisme." A born rationalist, his innate tendency was powerfully strengthened by the resolute positivism of the Second Empire period, and he continued for twenty years to show lively repugnance to all forms of mysticism. In an early article he remarks disdainfully that all the philosophizing of scholasticism was foredoomed to failure, because the problems which were discussed had

²⁹ "L'Evolution du transformisme," *Revue bleue*, Nov. 25, 1876, 2e série, tome XI, p. 512.

³⁰ Throughout most of his career he felt convinced that Buddhism was preferable to Christianity. His interest in the subject is attested by a passage in a letter published by M. Giraud: "... like almost all the young 'intellectuals' of my generation, I studied and knew Buddhism far better..." (V. Giraud, MH, I, 99.)

³¹ "Histoire ancienne des peuples de l'Orient," *Revue bleue*, Sept. 4, 1875, 2e série, tome IX, pp. 225, 226. The influence of Hegel, rather than Kant, is especially evident in many of his early expressions of opinion on science, religion, and metaphysics. As late as 1882 he identified Darwin's theory of evolution with "the old hypothesis of perpetual becoming, which, as is known, forms the base of any pantheistic metaphysics." ("Charles Darwin," *Revue bleue*, April 29, 1882, 3e série, tome III, p. 520.)

not been approached with an open mind. In similar vein, he reproaches a contemporary historian who had written that during a serious illness of Saint Louis, "the tears of his mother and the prayers of all his subjects obtained of heaven the continuance of his life."

Brunetière remarked gruffly: "The time is now past when history tried to explain the designs of Providence, and to penetrate its ways. This is because we no longer admire in Saint Louis what the Middle Ages admired especially in him. ... That ardor of devotion, *incendium devotionis*, and that untranslatable *suspendium contemplationis* of which an anonymous biographer speaks, awake no response in us."

He closes the argument vigorously by maintaining that a considerable number of the king's contemporaries were impatient with his exaggerated piety.³²

The most explicit and personal expression of the critic's distrust of mysticism is found a few years later:³³ "At the heart of all mysticism, even the purest, there is an undefinable something which is unwholesome and ambiguous."

The spirit of pure rationalism is so manifest here that it need not be dwelt upon. The influence of the *Zeitgeist*, and of the critic's two illustrious masters has already been indicated. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that such a permanent, deep-rooted orientation of his mind was wholly determined by external pressure. Thirty years later, after reacting violently against Taine and Renan, and after rejoining the Church which he had left when a youth, he embarked upon a program of Catholic apologetics and polemical articles whose spirit was, as his successor at the Academy said,³⁴ "purely rational and social." This abiding disposition to settle all problems rationally was innate and fundamental in the man. It lies at the core of his personality, the heart and center of his very being.

The historical and scientific predilections of his early manner, already touched upon, were germane to the youthful ardor of his intellectualism. It is generally agreed that he had a natural bent for history, but it is less often remarked that he tended usually towards speculative history. He had little taste for the minute details of erudite research, as several scholars could testify after his stinging rebukes. The historian, for Brunetière, had but one aim, — to formulate a philosophy of history. In scientific studies, his interest is likewise in the speculative side. He confesses that his great respect for Haeckel is caused by that scholar's practise of transposing the problems of science into the realm of metaphysics. Similarly, Darwin was "an admirable organizer of ideas."

In this lies the real merit and the extraordinary worth of Darwin. ... Facts have no value except in so far as they aid in the demonstration of ideas, and ideas, in turn, only as they are co-ordinated and organized into a unified whole.

This is precisely what guarantees that the name of Darwin will maintain its

³² "Saint-Louis et son temps." *Revue bleue*, Feb. 13, 1875, 2e série. tome VII, p. 782.

³³ *Revue des deux mondes*, Dec. 15, 1878, 3e période, tome XXX, p. 952. (Will be designated *infra* as RDM.)

³⁴ H. Barboux, in *Recueil des discours ... de l'Académie Française*, p. 426.

place in the history of contemporary science and philosophy.³⁵

With our critic endowed with such resolute faith in the validity and power of abstract reasoning, it is easy to foresee the general tendency of his work in literary criticism. Rejecting the biographical method, the personalities, the anecdotes,—in short,—the whole "particularizing" purpose of Sainte-Beuve, it will analyze only to generalize, concerning itself not with persons but with ideas, influences, and general trends and their development. This is literary history, rather than pure criticism,—literary history strongly colored by philosophical considerations. And such is indeed the nature of his best work,—volumes four and five of the *Etudes critiques*, certain articles in *Essais sur la littérature contemporaine*, and in *le Roman naturaliste*.

His main activity was not early devoted to literature, however. His keen interest in history, seconded by the precepts and example of his master Taine, had served him well in his assignments for the *Revue bleue*. These articles, and the preparation required for them, soon centered his interests on history. Even after he entered the *Revue des deux mondes* as literary critic, he continued his historical work at a steady pace, and for a time it seemed that his final choice would be history. *Histoire et littérature* (three volumes) is the title he gave to an early collection which includes more history than literature. His competence in French history is known to be considerable, and likewise his courage. A young beginner in the field, he did not hesitate to challenge Taine's interpretation, in his *Origines*, of certain facts, and even some of the facts themselves. His documentation was thorough, and his refutation absolutely convincing. It was a bold enterprise, brilliantly carried out. Equally impressive are a number of the other essays, some of them on minor historical points requiring a vast amount of research. These essays and monographs in history, written during the first decade of Brunetière's career, justify one in saying with confidence that he would have made a distinguished historian of the interpretative, speculative type exemplified by Taine.

Meanwhile he gained access to the *Revue des deux mondes*, through the good offices of Bourget. The latter had done some small articles for the *Revue*, and the director, the redoubtable Buloz, had summoned Bourget to a conference, with a view to making him the titular literary critic. The interview soon revealed a radical divergence of opinions, and the only agreement they could reach was that Bourget should not have the position. He left the *Revue* with the words of Buloz ringing in his ears: "Ah, Planche! Planche! Shall I never be able to replace Planche?"³⁶

Bourget reflected that if anybody was qualified to meet this specification, it was his young fellow-drudge. He walked directly to his friend's rooming-house, and made him agree to apply. A short interview at the *Revue* was enough, and thus was made the connection which was not dissolved until thirty-one years later, by the death of Brunetière.

Engaged for the rôle of Planche, he was generally regarded as a Classicist,

³⁵ "Charles Darwin," *Revue bleue*, April 29, 1882, 3e série, tome III, p. 523.

³⁶ This anecdote is related by P. Bourget, *op. cit.*, 289.

although there was some question as to his identity. "A second Nisard, less likeable, less elegant, less delicate, but vigorous, militant, and much more thoroughly equipped with learning, science, ideas, reasons, and philosophic spirit; orthodox, yet as bold and provocative as a heresiarch; such is M. Brunetière."³⁷

During the first ten years of his career he was frequently compared to Nisard. At the very first, however, the Naturalists who were the objects of the attacks in the *Revue des deux mondes* affected to believe that this new signature,—"F. Brunetière,"—was the pseudonym of a group of regular contributors. He was considerably piqued at seeing his very existence thus questioned, and he replied so sharply that all doubts were dispelled, and the identity, and presently the influence, of "F. Brunetière" were freely acknowledged.

His first article for the great *Revue* fired the opening gun in his long war upon Zola and the Naturalists, then well fortified in popular favor. For twelve years he maintained the siege, first cutting off their support by a portion of the reading public, and at length the enemy was in retreat. In 1888 he proclaimed the "bankruptcy" of Naturalism, and in the next few years his sentence, or prophecy, was verified. The question of his influence naturally arises here. We can scarcely expect it to be acknowledged by the Naturalists. An occasional author may admit his indebtedness to another author (preferably some years dead), but it is rarely indeed that he will concede the influence of a critic, especially that of a contemporary critic. The influence of Joubert on Chateaubriand, or that of Sainte-Beuve on Hugo's *Feuilles d'automne*, will remain conjectural.

The decline and fall of Naturalism from literary favor was, however, so obvious that one could almost plot its curve on a graph. Brunetière was not alone in his campaign, for Anatole France, Jules Lemaître, R. de Gourmont, and Edmond Scherer joined in the chorus of denunciation, and presently only an occasional second-rate critic could be found to raise his voice in defense. Brunetière was the acknowledged leader of the opposition; he was its initiator, its most active and persistent "whip," and finally, its most highly feared tactician and legislator. The popularity of Naturalism, which was rising when Brunetière opened his campaign, presently began to wane. After 1885 it dwindled, and it was disappearing in the early 'nineties, when the spirit of French letters became dominantly idealistic. Contemporary critics and observers readily acknowledged Brunetière's influence in all this.³⁸ Subsequent historians have continued, and rightly so, to associate the name of our critic with the decline of "brutal literature" in France.

His campaign was notable for its violence. Today we find these early articles amusing for their ferocity of tone.

Up to now, nobody has been found who was willing to undertake to comment didactically upon the beauties of *l'Assommoir* or of *le Ventre de Paris*;

³⁷ J. Lemaître, *les Contemporains*, le série, Paris, Lecène et Oudin, 1886, p. 223.

³⁸ Such acknowledgment was made by J. Lionnet, Charles Arnaud, J. Ernest-Charles, Charles Recolin, Faguet, Doumic, Martino, Giraud.

or in other words, and to speak plainly, nobody who was so naively infatuated with M. Zola as he himself is. Thereupon, M. Zola had only one thing to do, and he has done it; he has become his own critic. ... He has just written a copious dissertation on the "experimental novel"; now is the time to experiment on him, and to judge somewhat this great judge of others.

... even though he were the author of novels still less good than his, he might have ideas worth discussing. And were his prose ... even colder and more awkward than it is, that would not prevent his having an eye as penetrating as his hand is heavy, and thoughts as elevated or profound as his style is flat.

For his style is flat. ... As a writer he resembles that "king of the marketplace" of whom it was said that he knew all the words of the language, but knew not how to use them. M. Zola likewise knows all the words of our tongue, but ... he knows not their meaning, place, usage. ...³⁹

That is the tone, and it is to be regretted that we Americans, who display less temper and less interest in artistic matters, have allowed his splenetic manner of expression to distract our attention from the truth of his ideas. For Brunetière, who is habitually violent, is always lucid and nearly always sensible and well-informed, and it is only through our own lack of understanding that we can reproach him for his alleged "incomprehension" and lack of "breadth of mind." Only a superficial observer can ascribe his strictures to timidity or willful optimism. These are the charges made by the Naturalists themselves, and they brought heated denials from Brunetière. We already know what to think of his "optimism." We also know his defense and his admiration of the art of Anatole France and Paul Hervieu. To these should be added the names of Edouard Rod, Daudet, Flaubert, Maupassant and others who were assuredly not timid in their expression. It would seem that his objections were motivated not by timidity, but by artistic taste.

As for the charge of incomprehension, it has been answered by a good judge of such matters,—Jules Lemaître:

M. Brunetière is very intelligent (and I use the word in its broadest sense). Certain youths call him a pedant and say, "he does not understand." On the contrary, it is evident that he always understands, but frequently he does not relish. ... In short, if he has fought such a good fight against the excesses of Naturalism and *japonisme*, it is not that he fails to perceive the nature of these new artistic devices, or ... what kind of pleasure they provide. He merely ranks this pleasure rather low, and does not enjoy it.⁴⁰

So far, in this discussion of Brunetière's war on Naturalism, consideration has been given only to those principles and attitudes which were relatively permanent in the critic,—in short, to Brunetière the rationalist. But his head was not always in agreement with his heart, and especially in his earliest work one finds sentimental considerations

³⁹ F. Brunetière, *le Roman naturaliste*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1896, 5e édition, pp. 121, 122. (Will be designated *infra* as RN.)

⁴⁰ J. Lemaître, *op. cit.*, I, 221.

which it would be hard to justify rationally. In the same essay, Lemaître objects to the sentimental bias which made Brunetière admit the portrayal of the humblest classes only if the author brightened it by "a ray of the ideal," and relieved the general sordidness of impression by giving to the characters "sentiments which brighten our features, bring tears to our eyes, and quicken our heart."

This expression, it should be observed, was of 1875. A few years later, as Lemaître notes, Brunetière's requirement of idealism is "less banal," and he is satisfied with "anything that is greater or finer than vulgarity." Thus, in Flaubert's novel, "the acuity of Emma Bovary's senses," is considered a sufficient "ray of the ideal." This assuredly marks a progression, as Lemaître admits in this same essay of 1883.

If he had written it five years later, he could have noted a completed evolution away from the sentimental considerations just noted. Brunetière was a born humanitarian, and the youthful ardor of his sentimental idealism was repressed and cooled only by the steady pressure of his cold rationalism and reasoned pessimism. Restrained it was, but always latent, for a period of about ten years, after which it burst forth (1895) with renewed impetus, when it became the moving force in the critic's abdication of criticism and teaching, his late conversion to Catholicism, and his final campaign for social and moral uplift.

In view of this evolution, it was natural that his early repugnance to Naturalism, which verged on commonplace sentimentality, should have been progressively sublimated into the form of philosophical and aesthetic theories. Such was the case. His acceptance of *Madame Bovary* points the way. Not content with merely withdrawing his requirement of "a ray of the ideal," he goes out of his way to pronounce the novel a masterpiece, and wholly moral, after Sainte-Beuve had questioned its morality. He accepts Flaubert's dictum that the author's treatment should be entirely impersonal, and that if a work of art be true, its morality is implicit and genuine. By this same principle of truth and perspective he absolves from the charge of immorality writers as diverse as Racine, Molière, Le Sage, Daudet, Maupassant. He proclaims himself a Naturalist, and while admitting the validity of both idealistic and Naturalistic literature, he prefers the latter as being conducive to the attaining of higher artistic value.

Realizing the weaknesses of his earlier, instinctive demand for sympathy and idealism, he transforms it, by philosophical considerations, into an ingenious aesthetic theory, which holds that sympathy is requisite for the observation and expression of the psychology of characters. Even so, he grants that it is not necessary in all forms of the novel, and that *Madame Bovary* has no need of it. In a very curious essay⁴¹ written during this period he defends vigorously the popular demand for sympathetic characters, and justifies them as a powerful aid to the reader's interest and hence, to successful writing. He denies, however, that "sympathetic" and "virtuous" are synonyms, and recalls Manon Lescaut, Othello, Phèdre and Roxane on the one hand, and Sir Charles Grandison on the other. Not content with carrying the matter thus far, he frequently protests against the

⁴¹ "Le personnage sympathique," in his *Histoire et littérature*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, vol. I (1884). (Will be designated *infra* as HL.)

abuse of sympathy and emotional appeal. These are various qualities of sympathy, and he brands as inferior the type which we find so often in Dickens, and occasionally in Daudet. In the modern novel he finds its most artistic form in the works of George Eliot.

This theorizing is, characteristic of the mature work of Brunetière. Between 1880 and 1890 he elaborated a number of aesthetic theories which do no little honor to the man as an original and vigorous thinker. The fact that they usually come to conclusions which verify Classical traditions or "prejudices" has perhaps caused them to be neglected by historians. They have not noted sufficiently that his Classicism and traditionalism are motivated by original, modern and frequently unorthodox considerations, and thus exemplify his paradoxical "theory of the commonplace" and its related theory of originality in art. The "evolution of the genres" is the most startling of his literary hypotheses, and therefore attracted the greatest attention. It is no more original or revolutionary than the others, but merely of greater scope; it is eminently traditional in its implications, for with its emphasis on *moment* or momentum, it tends to make of each work in a genre the direct product of its predecessors. Despite the alarm and scandal which was caused by this theory of literary evolution, Brunetière knew exactly what he was doing. He had not sold belles-lettres in chains to positivism and science, as some of the more timid-minded reproached him;⁴² he was merely trying to bring criticism up to date, as he liked to say, finding new reasons to admire the old masters, and incidentally giving to criticism the dignity, impersonality and authority that it so sadly needed.

The increasingly intellectual orientation of his thought is reflected throughout the 'eighties by the elaboration of these successive theories, and by the decline of his humanitarian fervor. The latter is still evident, to be sure, in his hearty endorsement of George Eliot and the English novel in general, in preference to the French. It is evident that George Eliot made a very strong appeal and even exerted considerable influence upon him, for her expansive sympathy and humanitarianism fitted well with his own positivism. Yet her influence was less upon his social ideas than upon his literary taste, and even here it waned towards the end of the 'eighties. Despite the coldness, the irony, the "brutality" of Flaubert and Maupassant, he gradually came to feel that their impeccable workmanship in structure and style was after all the chief consideration, and that this ranked them definitely above the English novelists. It is during this period that he achieves the balance of all his faculties, and his best work in aesthetic criticism dates from these years. It was this period, too, that saw him approach and finally embrace the idea of art for art's sake, which in later years he was to denounce so violently. It was the period, in short, when his resolute rationalism held his emotional nature in check, and thus his searching intellect could approach all problems serenely, and most nearly attain that impersonality which was his ideal.

Now lest we conceive of him as the embodiment of Vigny's *Esprit pur*, let us see him at work, and hear him speak familiarly in correspondence with his brother. At this point Ferdinand Brunetière, the sworn enemy of memoirs, "confessions" and published correspondences, will no doubt turn over in his grave in the Montparnasse cemetery, but

⁴² Cf. O. d'Haussonville, *A l'Académie Française et autour de l'Académie*, Paris, Hachette, 1907, pp. 22-26.

it will not be the first time, for his brother published these letters some years ago. And after all, he was not the disembodied intellect that he tried so hard to be. If his criticism is assuredly not "the most subjective literature which ever was written," as a recent writer has maintained,⁴³ yet the critic's attitude towards literature and towards life was determined by the nature of the man. All of which is doubtless a roundabout way of admitting that Brunetière's own criticism would have benefited in human warmth and geniality, and perhaps sometimes in justice, if he had occasionally indulged in "the personal criticism of Sainte-Beuve."⁴⁴ *Tel arbre, tel fruit*, the latter used to say, and then would focus his attention on the tree. *Tel arbre, tel fruit*, Brunetière repeated, and proceeded to concentrate upon the fruit. The difference is profound, in the study of *littera humaniores*. Contrary to our critic's firm belief, his method tended not to make his work more literary, but merely less humane. To apply rigorously his method to his work would surely do an injustice to the work, and to the man.

After entering the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1875 he continued his regular contributions to the *Revue bleue*, and also his teaching. In 1877 he writes of his multifarious duties:

As usual, I am overloaded with work. Seven hours of classes per week at Louis-le-Grand, two hours at Sainte-Barbe, six hours in a so-called Preparatory Institution,—that is my inventory.

Item—now in preparation for the *Revue des deux mondes*—a long article on Maria Theresa, and a long article on Frederick, and a long article on Voltaire, not to mention the short ones,

Item—for the *Revue bleue*—a long article on insanity, and a long one on the Æsthetics of the Drama, and another long one on the Metaphysics of Love!

Item—for the publisher Germer-Baillière—a history of contemporary Russia, (half done, two-thirds written),

Item—for the French Academy prize—a Eulogy of Buffon. This, to be sure, is still in the domain of future contingencies, and I think I have the desire, rather than the firm intention, to set about it.

I won't mention such trifles as lectures on literature once a week for young ladies, or translations from the German, which are paid in tickets to the *théâtre de la guerre*, with "thanks from the grateful author," do you want one? With all that, if I am not a busy man, find one.⁴⁵

A year later he is just as busy, and at his lament the heart of every college professor will go out to him:

I could think of nothing more slavish, in my professorial treadmill, than the regularity of days and hours which is exacted of us, if it were not for the correcting of papers, the most tedious of jobs and the most stupefying of all

⁴³ J. Bertaut, in *Vingt-cinq ans de littérature française*, I, 244.

⁴⁴ It is Brunetière's phrase. He repeated and developed it scores of times. Cf., for example, EPL, I, 10.

⁴⁵ C. Brunetière, *op. cit.*, 9. Some of these articles never materialized, or I have found no trace of them. It would be interesting to read Brunetière on the metaphysics of love!

occupations. It costs dearly to live at Paris, and in more than one way.⁴⁶

Later in the same year, his brother complained of the onerous duties of military life, saying that in the last two weeks he had had only three mornings to himself. The young critic replies rather sharply that in view of his own program, such a schedule is preferable.

[Three mornings] is a great deal, and I cannot say as much, for, excepting Sundays—and not every Sunday,—throughout the week, the fortnight, the month, I do not have a single free morning,—I say *a single one*. ... It is apparent that you will never understand ... all the work that is required of a person who has thirty hours of classes per week, some near the Panthéon, some on the Boulevard des Batignolles, without counting the private lessons. And into the bargain, when I finally come home, something like 500 papers to read and correct. Add to that, articles which require, like my last one, from eight to ten months of preparation, and the others that I must keep working at, for the future, so as not to give the public a chance to forget my name. ...⁴⁷

Evidently the determination to get ahead and make a name for himself is just as strong as it was seven years before, when without diploma, and with seventy-five francs and a silver watch, his only "fortune," he insisted on going to Paris and starting his career in the world of letters.

In this correspondence there are occasional glimpses of personal traits and preferences which the critic's published works do not always reveal. As early as 1880 he speaks of Eugène-Melchior de Vogüé, and highly commends the historical writings of this liberal aristocrat who was destined to influence Brunetière so profoundly by his winsome and polished personality, his "social Catholicism," and his profound knowledge of Russian literature. It was felt that Vogüé, almost single-handed, introduced and popularized the great Russian writers who were practically unknown in France previously, and it is highly probable that he brought about Brunetière's acquaintance with Tolstoy, whose ideas on society, art and morality are similar to those of our critic during his last years.

In one of these letters⁴⁸ Brunetière speaks of the novels of Cherbuliez, Theuriet and Feuillet, and adds with assurance, "the last is the most artistic of the three, if not the most vigorous." This is what we should expect, in view of the critic's reverence for the beauties of style, and his comparative insensibility to the beauties of nature.

In 1882 he mentions Paul Stapfer,⁴⁹ then professor of foreign literature at Grenoble. "I consider him to have one of the keenest minds in the University. He knows German literature well, and even the English, but the French less well, not to say rather

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁷ *Idem*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

badly."

He regrets his inability to speak his mind publicly concerning a novel then appearing serially. He considers it wretched, but silence is advisable, for the novel in question is being published by the *Revue des deux mondes*.

Whenever possible, however, he jealously guarded his independence, even in the smallest matters, as the following incident eloquently testifies. As dramatic critic, he received complimentary tickets to the theatres, and his brother had asked for two of them, in behalf of members of the family. Brunetière refused, adding critically, and almost dramatically:

... because these [tickets] are favors, and as soon as they cease to be strictly personal,—in which case they are one's right,—one implicitly binds oneself, towards the person from whom they are obtained, to a return favor which may some day or other hamper the liberty which we need to keep, not only as a very precious possession, but also as our very principle of existence. You will have to explain this with all courtesy to the ladies ... but you need make no apologies for my *inability* to comply. ...⁵⁰

Meanwhile the steady production of original and impressive articles was beginning to win him promotion. Late in 1880 he writes:

I should tell you that my situation at the *Revue* will be slightly changed next year. I shall leave the office, of which I am getting somewhat tired, and I shall devote myself solely to "my dear studies." I shall continue, the 15th of each month, my literary reviews, only I shall add six long articles per year. ... As you see, my dream is little by little approaching realization, and soon I shall have no other occupation than to spill ink. I have been working for this for almost twelve or thirteen years. It is probable that this new arrangement will give me more liberty.⁵¹

But early in the next year he laments:

... once again my plans have gone topsy-turvy, as they usually do. It was in vain that for a moment I thought I had broken my chains; I am chained again, and my liberty lasted scarcely two weeks. An urgent request,—a very flattering one,—has brought me back to the office of the *Revue des deux mondes*, and although I have not yet signed any agreement, I fear that I shall remain there for a long time to come. ...

What are your diversions? I scarcely have any, there being so many things that I am becoming more and more tired of,—society for example, and the theatre too, and everything else besides. My philosophy is becoming more and more that of a laborious Epicurean; work, more work, and occasionally a halt from work for

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

a good succulent repast,—note that the world is *repast*, not *repose*.⁵²

When he is engaged upon a serious piece of work he cannot be interrupted for anything, not even a family letter, he tells his brother patiently in 1883. He speaks of lecturing at the Sorbonne, and of a book he is writing on "The French Novel in the Eighteenth Century." This is another title which never appeared. He was constantly undertaking new projects while carrying out the old ones. His confidence in his own powers was very great. He was an incredibly fast reader, and since his mind worked so rapidly, he took pride in doing more work than any two men in the office.⁵³

All this, combined with his long hours, tireless energy, and the spur of his ambition, enabled him to accomplish a prodigious amount of work. But like most prodigies, he overestimated his capacities. He was constantly announcing books and articles which never appeared. And he was afflicted with an incurably meticulous devotion to minute details,—a malady which is fatal to the man who would really accomplish his plans. His friends tell us that he would correct proofs for his own books as many as fifteen times. The following extract betrays the same disposition:

Try to imagine the work required for each issue [Brunetière was now, in 1883, *secrétaire de rédaction*], those 240 pages to read, and even when you do not have to change the text, they must all be corrected typographically. Besides that, a few visits, dinners, and parties which are, unfortunately, obligatory; projects to work on, an infinite amount of reading to do, were it only to fill the *Bulletin bibliographique*, and you will understand that since I am not in the least a Spartan,—even priding myself on being the contrary, as far as my means allow,—you will understand how my letters may be exposed to the accusation, or the compliment, of laconicism.⁵⁴

He would have rejected the term "Spartan" because of its association with Greek antiquity, if for no other reason. He was so determined an intellectual that he had a lofty scorn for any kind of "physical training," and he cites Pascal's frail body and colossal intellect as an eternal refutation of the popular misconception which would "lodge genius only in the body of an athlete."^{54a} In his later years he inveighs frequently against the Greeks' cultivation of the "sound body," and he rebukes Pindar for his deplorable over-emphasis on athletics.

He would have done well to be less disdainful, for he was of a highly nervous temperament, and his own body was far too frail for the strain imposed upon it. In 1882,

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20, 21.

⁵³ "I once saw him, during his last illness, read four books in a single afternoon,—and he read them in such a way as to assimilate all their substance. They were on separate subjects; one was on Pascal, another concerned maritime questions. And he was not satisfied merely to read; he reread, and annotated. He built up a splendid library. ... Thus he had acquired, when still young, a universality and a ubiquity of knowledge which recalled, and as I believe, surpassed that of Voltaire." (Giraud, MAA, 212-213.)

⁵⁴ C. Brunetière, *op. cit.*, 27-28.

^{54a} EC, III, 40.

at the age of 33, he complains bitterly of ill health, and blames the oppressive heat in Paris during August and September. "For two months I have been fatigued to the point of stupefying somnolence ... All this, I am glad to say, does not prevent me from working."⁵⁵ Although his condition did not improve, he said nothing more of it to his brother. After a two-month interval, the latter became alarmed at a report received from a common friend, and wrote for direct information. The reply is highly characteristic of the man. After expressing his annoyance that the report of his ill health had been spread, he admits that his condition has shown no improvement, and that he is now subject to short spells of dizziness and fainting. Then he continues:

I shall profit by today's holiday to go and speak of this strange phenomenon to my physician. As usual, he will prescribe medicines, and again as usual, (to quote Molière), I shall be none the better for them. However, as long as I am not in pain,—and I am not in pain,—I shall not worry unduly over these trifling matters. And by the way, it would please me if you would repeat nothing of all this. ...⁵⁶

Although he never recovered good health, he continued his strenuous program of study and his regular contributions to the two *Revues*, "like an article-factory," as he expressed it.⁵⁷ The consecutive promotions and honors which he attained, all bound him to new responsibilities, and—what was more important in his eyes,—to new and greater opportunities for active influence. It would be hard to overestimate the importance of this factor, knowing as we do the man's high seriousness, sincerity, and humanitarian preoccupations. The young critic, caught up in the first flush of success, might well be content to continue the intellectual and aesthetic criticism which had won him his spurs; indeed he did so throughout the 'eighties, and it was during this period that he produced his finest work. Yet even then he was far from the airy irresponsibility of Jules Lemaître. An inherent seriousness, or if you prefer, a precocious maturity, impelled the young Brunetière to remind the aging Renan, in 1882:

Why should I not say it? Men like M. Renan, in the position that he occupies, with the influence he exerts, with the force of his intellect and his brilliant talents,—such men are somewhat their brother's keeper. They do not live or think or speak only for themselves, but for all those who read them and heed them, and for whom they are guides. For youth is always the same, it looks only for talent; to the honor of youth we may say it is always carried away by it.⁵⁸

The young critic could not know, or scarcely dare to hope, that ten years later the mantle of Renan would, by general consent, be transferred to his own shoulders. But since that is what came to pass, we should not be surprised that Ferdinand Brunetière felt the deepest personal responsibility for his authority and influence.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁷ *Idem.*

⁵⁸ RDM, June 15, 1882, 3e période, tome LI, pp. 941-942.

The ascent was gradual, of course. In 1886, seventeen years after being refused entrance to that institution as a student, he was appointed Professor of French Literature at the Ecole Normale. This made quite a stir at Paris, for the appointee did not have the academic training customarily required for such a position; he had taught in no comparable institution; and being still in his thirties, he was accounted a very young man by the venerable tradition of the Ecole Normale.

His success as a teacher there was immediate and notable. All contemporary accounts of his lectures reveal him as an orator of singular brilliance and persuasiveness,—a veritable spellbinder. And considering that the spellbound ones were the *normaliens*, never noted for their docility, his success was no mean achievement. His students have remained loyal to his memory, and they include some of the greatest names in twentieth-century French letters. A partial list would include Lanson, Bédier, Giraud, Bertrand, Chamard, Strowski, Herriot, Michaut, Mornet, Goyau, Souday. Their attitude towards their master is well expressed by one of them:

You could not hear him and remain indifferent; there was in his dialectics ... something of the "flaming logic" of Pascal. And it is doubtless for this reason that, for better or for worse, he has never been spoken of dispassionately. ...

What was the secret of his irresistible hold upon his students? It was not the result merely of the physical power of his expression, and that incomparable force of persuasion which, by entirely different means, made him the equal of Jaurès himself. What pleased in him was his combative ardor, it was the truly *revolutionary* spirit of his criticism.

The phrase will astonish those who knew Brunetière only as director of the *Revue des deux mondes*, but it must not be forgotten that at the beginning of his career, and during the most fruitful years of his life the author of the *Etudes critiques* appeared as a "demolisher" and iconoclast. With what zest and what verve he broke the idols of literature or of history! With what pitiless clairvoyance he would demolish Fénelon, Voltaire, or Jean-Jacques! Just out of school, his students took pleasure in burning in his fire all that they had adored,—in all docility,—in their rhetoric classes. Brunetière did not teach conventional admiration, but methodical doubt and disrespect; he animated his disciples with his "vigorous hatreds"; just or not, his criticism stimulated the intelligence, and, by freeing it from manuals, stereotyped phraseology, and formulas, taught it to think clearly.

Brunetière a master of free-thinking! This resembles very little the present-day idea of the man, in accordance with his latest attitudes.⁵⁹ And indeed he "evolved" a great deal, like the genres whose transformations he has described. ... From 1886 to 1896 Brunetière was evolutionist, positivist, anticlerical. In 1893 a band of excited students came to disrupt his course at the Sorbonne, and with cries of "Vive Zola!" tried to prevent him from beginning his lecture; at once his *normaliens* rushed up, armed with clubs, and violently dislodged the disturbers from the great amphitheatre. Now I am certain that what these young men were defending in the person of Brunetière was not only, as in heroic times, the liberty

⁵⁹ This was written in December, 1906.

of speech and of thought, but also the modern spirit in its boldest, noblest, proudest form.⁶⁰

The fact that he appeared to his students as an iconoclast and free-thinker is in striking contrast to the present-day conception of him as a reactionary. In truth he was a very bold thinker, and the Naturalists, philologists, and sundry others whose enmity he had earned by his attacks, had only obscured the issue when they reproached him (with more or less sincerity) as a timid traditionalist and opponent of modernity. Brunetière felt that he was more modern than they, and he was determined to prove it. From this time on his preoccupation with "questions of the day" becomes increasingly evident, and in one sense his final rupture with science, conversion to the Church, attitude towards the Dreyfus affair, and, in general, the reactionary position adopted in the last few years of his life may be attributed to a feeling of futility and defeat in his attempt to solve all problems by a purely "modern" approach.

This "modernity" is especially evident in his confidence that human reason could solve the social and moral problems of the day. Highly significant in this connection is his enthusiastic endorsement of Schopenhauer's philosophy, which he advocates as a satisfactory substitute for Christianity, no longer acceptable to modern minds "henceforth and forever emancipated by science."⁶¹ Only a rabid rationalist could have offered such a substitute, and only a Brunetière could have believed that the public would find an adequate inspiration in the bitter pessimism of the sage of Frankfort.

The fallacy is explained by his assumption that his fellowmen were as rational and as pessimistic as he, and by his fundamental misunderstanding of the Christian religion. Irving Babbitt noted Brunetière's habitual references to Christianity and Buddhism as "the great pessimistic religions," and he observed keenly:⁶² "He failed ... to appreciate that positive principle of joy and illumination which is the saving element of both Christianity and Buddhism." It is well said, and throws light on the particular nature of Brunetière's Catholicism when he finally returned to the fold. It also helps us to see how he could propose Schopenhauer as the successor of Jesus. A peculiar kind of misanthropic Stoic, Brunetière was always inclined to accuse his contemporaries of identifying joy with optimism, than which there was no greater source of error, in his opinion. After reviewing the woes of modern society, he exclaims:

It would be easy to prove that it is the persistence of optimism which has brought about this materialistic society, and this sole reason would suffice, if there were no others, to make me incline to pessimism.

... a man can be an optimist only on condition that he abdicate that faculty of thought which constitutes the nobility and the sole dignity of our mortal nature.

... pessimism has at all times been the instrument of what little moral progress has

⁶⁰ G. Téry, in *le Matin*, December 10, 1906.

⁶¹ F. Brunetière, *Essais sur la littérature contemporaine*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1892, p. 78. (Will be designated infra as ELC.)

⁶² I. Babbitt, *The Masters of Modern French Criticism*, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin, 1912, pp. 310-11.

been accomplished in the world. For dissatisfaction is the root of change; whosoever is satisfied with himself and with things as they are, has no reason to wish that they be altered, and when all goes well in the best of worlds, it is obviously idle to try to improve anything.⁶³

Such expression seems unequivocal, surely. "That faculty of thought which makes the nobility and the sole dignity of our mortal nature," is as resolute and as sweeping a statement as the *Cogito ergo sum* of Descartes. Yet we find in the same essay a statement which formally contradicts it:

... whatever the value of his [Schopenhauer's] system, I believe that in the future he will occupy a highly honorable position among the great philosophers, were it only for having reestablished the will in that primacy, so to speak, from which Cartesian rationalism had dislodged it, two centuries before, in favor of the intellect.⁶⁴

These expressions, dating from 1886, well illustrate two sides of Brunetière's nature. If to these we add the humanitarian motives already observed in his early work (and they reappear in this essay), we have the man complete. Ten years later, amid the uproar caused by his "surrender to Rome," he scandalized the clergy by maintaining persistently that the great dogmas, such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, etc., cannot be proved rationally, and are merely to be accepted on faith. To complete his thought and the vexation of the clergy he frequently spoke his mind on the subject of faith, saying that we should change the old phrase: *On croit ce qu'on peut*, and make it read: *On croit ce qu'on veut*.⁶⁵ In short, he made it a matter of the will. And the "will to believe," finally, followed as the logical consequence of one's appreciation of the social needs which could only be remedied by the Church.⁶⁶ Was there ever a more purely rationalistic endorsement of mysticism? Rationalism, humanitarianism, and a driving sense of duty,—or in other words,—the head, the heart, the will, these formed the man Brunetière, and one or another of them dominated with the change of external circumstances.

That sense of moral responsibility, for whose lack he had rebuked Renan, was inevitably strengthened in Brunetière as a result of his success at the Ecole Normale, and his awareness of the enormous influence which he exerted upon the most select group of young French teachers-to-be. The natural result upon a man of his character was a new "examination of conscience," to use his phrase, to determine the quality of his moral influence. This tendency was accentuated by the trend of the times.

The decline of Naturalism denoted not the mere caprice of a fickle public, but the

⁶³ "Les Causes du pessimisme," *Revue bleue*, Jan. 30, 1886, 3e série, tome IX, p. 144.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁵ Cf., for example, F. Brunetière, *Discours académiques*, Paris, Perrin, 1901, p. 48. (Will be designated *infra* as DA.)

⁶⁶ All this can be found in the text and footnotes of F. Brunetière, *la Science et la religion*, Paris, Firmin-Didot, 1895. (Will be designated *infra* as SR.)

passing of that positivism and materialism of which the Zola school was the literary expression. These modes of thought had indeed, during recent years, been subjected to repeated attacks by leaders in philosophy and psychology, but as always, men of letters and the reading public were slow to abandon the spirit which had reigned over a period of several decades.

This reaction in philosophy was far-reaching, and of profound significance. Writing in 1920, Pierre Lasserre said:

It seems that during the last forty years we see taking place in philosophy the inverse of what occurred when the mathematicism and the mechanism of the Cartesian school dethroned the old scholasticism. The conception of the universe which had been founded on the results and the methods of modern physics and mathematics, taken as the exclusive arbiters of truth, is seen to be attacked on all sides. And what is new is that it is attacked in the name of those same sciences which had served as its basis and whose authority covered it. ... In a word, that portion of reality which can be explained and elucidated by the application of the methods and the forms of analysis proper to science is considered to be far more restricted than it was for a long time thought to be.⁶⁷

The idea of the relativity and approximateness of scientific laws was developed by A. Cournot and Charles Renouvier. The latter saw a "renaissance of Aristotelianism" in the famous theory of the "contingency" of natural laws, so powerfully set forth by E. Boutroux.⁶⁸ The influence of Boutroux was profound, and likewise the significance of this influence, for by denying the absolute value of physical laws, he insinuated the finality and the role of moral reasons.

Gaston Milhaud, scientist and philosopher, proclaimed that experimental and experiential data were necessarily influenced by the logical forms of the mind, and had therefore only a conventional or probable value. In a similar spirit, Arthur Hannequin attacked the atomic theory as an expression of the natural propensities of the human mind to reduce all reality to a notion of quantity. He concluded in favor of a kind of naïve intuitiveness. Lachelier, Fouillée, Blondel, Bergson and Meyerson all contributed, though in various ways, to the general reaction against the scientific dogmatism of Descartes, and the scientific determinism of the nineteenth century, with its supposed universality of range and application. It was not until the turn of the century, however, that the new critical spirit in science and philosophy was popularized and accredited by the authority and penetrating analysis of Henri Poincaré, in his *Science et hypothèse* (1902), *Valeur de la science* (1905), *Science et méthode* (1909). His relativism rejects the mathematical ontologism which the nineteenth century had developed from Descartes and Pythagoras. He accepts the authority of reason only in the realm of mathematical and physical phenomena. As for the domains of metaphysics, poetry, ethics, the human mind is indeed restrained by good sense, he holds, but surely not by the bondage of physical

⁶⁷ P. Lasserre, in *Vingt-cinq ans de littérature française*, I, 97, 98

⁶⁸ Emile Boutroux, *la Contingence des lois de la nature*, (1874), and *l'idée de loi naturelle* (1894).

determinism.⁶⁹

This changing spirit was progressively reflected in literature, beginning in the 'eighties. The development of Symbolism, at its height by 1885, is perhaps its first striking manifestation. The success of Loti's exoticism indicates the public's receptivity to a change. Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883-1885) are at once a refinement of the methods of his master Taine, and a reaction against his theory of universal determinism. Vogüé's *Roman russe* (1886) revealed the warming spirit of Russian sympathy and "humanity," and his preface *A ceux qui ont vingt ans* created a deep stir among the youth of the land. Most strikingly significant was, of course, Bourget's *Disciple* (1889), which with its preface constituted an open break with the spirit of the Second Empire. The generation of 1870 was asserting itself.

It would be hazardous to affirm that this book itself had any decisive influence on Brunetière. The comrade of its author since youth, Brunetière was doubtless well aware of the direction of his friend's thought, and it has even been suggested that *le Disciple* reflects the influence of its author's critic friend. These are questions on which M. Bourget alone has authority to speak. What is very clear, however, is the two friends' community of thought. The storm of controversy aroused by the novel elicited prompt expression by Brunetière, and in two vigorous articles he endorsed Bourget's thesis unreservedly, proclaiming at the same time the validity of literary art which attempts to prove or disprove a thesis.

The principle at stake in *le Disciple* is, of course, the responsibility of the teacher or leader for the application of his doctrines. Brunetière's attitude on the question could have been anticipated by recalling what he had said, six years before, concerning Renan's responsibility, or rather, his irresponsibility. M. Bourget was striking directly at the spirit of Taine and his generation. This spirit was well expressed by Gaston Paris. Speaking at the Collège de France during the siege of Paris, he said:⁷⁰

... the object of science is truth, and truth for its own sake, without any concern for the consequences, whether good or evil, regrettable or fortunate, which this truth might have in practice. ... Above nationalities. ...

Although the controversy over *le Disciple* was undoubtedly an important factor in the evolution of Brunetière's thought, one should not exaggerate its significance, as some historians have done, to the point of making it the turning-point in his career. In the logical, systematic mind of our critic, the problem of the responsibility of a great leader was bound up with the more general question of human responsibility, in whatever province of activity. This in turn raised the question of art for art's sake. Is art accountable to society, or is it quite autonomous and independent? Logic requires that this be denied, if one maintains the responsibility of the individual. The fact that

⁶⁹ This treatment of the philosophical movement has been abridged and adapted from Pierre Lasserre, in *Vingt-cinq ans de littérature française*, vol. I, pp. 98-108.

⁷⁰ Quoted from V. Giraud, "Un Demi-siècle de pensée française," in RDM, March 1, 1918, 6e période, tome XLIV, p. 98.

Brunetière continued for some time to admit the doctrine of art for art's sake, even while proclaiming the responsibility of the individual leader, indicates that his mind was not yet clear on the matter, despite the tone of dogmatic certitude which he employed when defending his friend's novel. Several years later he stated to a friend that about 1889 he recommenced his religious education. It is evident that this was a period of doubt and hesitation for him. The controversy over *le Disciple* aroused his latent sentiment of social duty, to the prejudice of his pride in human intellect. Its effect was to bring him out of the lofty heights of abstract speculation where he had been residing for some years, down to the realities of practical application. Another incident of the same year (1889) served the same purpose, and contributed to his open break with his masters.

M. Pierre Moreau, who has had access to Brunetière's papers, has given us an interesting account of the critic's last visit to Renan. They had been on friendly terms for years, and when Brunetière was about to write an article on *l'Abbesse de Jouarre* he went to call upon the master. They had a friendly visit, at the end of which the author handed over a copy of the new work, saying that he had marked specially those passages to which he desired the critic to give special attention in his review. Arriving at home, Brunetière was considerably annoyed by the spirit which animated the book, and more so by the marginal directions. One of the marked passages read: "O Dieu des âmes simples, pourquoi t'ai-je abandonné?"

Brunetière suspected that Renan was making sport of him, and disregarded *l'Abbesse de Jouarre*. Instead, he wrote a review of Renan's recent *Histoire du peuple d'Israël*. M. Moreau implies that Renan took offense at this. Brunetière, it would seem, had at least as much reason to be vexed.⁷¹

The review was, for all that, a model of restrained and lucid discussion, and there is intelligent praise of certain features. He does indeed object to the familiar, patronizing tone of certain pleasantries; then he resolutely goes to the heart of the matter, inquiring soberly:

... what remains of a religion from which one has successively eliminated the supernatural, the immortality of the soul, and the idea of Providence? ... The supernatural, that is to say the miraculous, ... [is] historically the basis of all religions, without which even a religion is merely metaphysics. ...⁷²

In short, he objects to Renan's attempt to keep the name while denying the thing. On the whole, however, he is still the disciple of Renan, if not the friend. For example, he quotes approvingly the statement of the great historian: "Christian theology, with its

⁷¹ P. Moreau, "Brunetière et Renan," in *le Correspondent*, February 25, 1923, nouvelle série, tome 254, p. 598.

M. Moreau states that when the *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France* was founded, Renan agreed to be patron only on condition that Brunetière be excluded from the editorial staff. (*Ibid.*, 598-599.)

⁷² F. Brunetière.—*Nouveaux essais sur la littérature contemporaine*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1895, p. 251. (Will be designated *infra* as NELC.)

Bible, has been since the sixteenth century the worst enemy of science," and he adds: "It had been such long before the sixteenth century." He goes on to reaffirm his central thought, saying that the only reason why the great doctors of scholasticism did not play, in the history of ideas, the part of a Descartes or a Bacon is that "the solutions of the problems they considered were, so to speak, imposed in advance, and the principles of science, as well as its conclusions, were given by the Bible."⁷³

This is fundamental. It is the historical, or rational, point of view acquired in his youth from Renan and Burnouf, and which persisted for thirty years. Late in life he stated privately to M. Giraud that these scholars had delayed his conversion for fifteen years, and he admitted publicly, during an attack upon Renan, that he was one of those who, in the words of La Bruyère, *battent leur nourrice*. In this article, however, he is still avowedly an unbeliever, albeit with strong misgivings concerning the possibility of founding a morality outside religion. It was with such a purpose that he had seized so eagerly upon the philosophy of Schopenhauer.

... it is the glory of the author [Schopenhauer] ... to have completely "laicized" what was, in the morality of Buddhism and Christianity, most elevated, and better still, most difficult to make people admit ... Schopenhauer deduced, from the spectacle of life itself, the teaching which the great pessimistic religions had derived, as it were, from revelation; ... and stripping the doctrine of its theological robes, he claimed to found it upon the purely philosophical consideration of the world and humanity. ... Since we find it at the base of all religions, it must surely be the ideal doctrine to which man has aspired since he began to know himself. Schopenhauer did nothing more than to found it in reason. This will be considered enough, doubtless, to make his name glorious, and his philosophy endure.⁷⁴

This renewed concern with morality increased through the last fifteen years of his life. Note that it was not a matter of individual morality. The dogma of original sin haunted him constantly, and it was no mere figure of speech when he maintained, as he always did, that the Darwinian doctrine of animal descent amounted to the same thing. A fallen angel or a risen ape, it was the same sorry picture of mankind. This belief in the essential perversity of human nature,—which incidentally accounts for much of his antagonism to Rousseau and the eighteenth century,—led him to seek a coordinated doctrine and discipline which would impose the morality of the old religion upon a people now emancipated by science from religion, and also, as he feared, from morality. Sainte-Beuve's remark,⁷⁵ "In France we shall continue to be Catholics long after we have ceased to be Christians," is eminently true of Brunetière. Just as Renan's mind, so aptly termed *une cathédrale désaffectée*, liked to dream of a scientific hell and inquisition, a scientific Heaven and God, so did Brunetière translate new doctrines into the terms of Catholicism. Schopenhauer's theory of the will-to-live he compares to the dogma of original sin, and his conception of the will to the dogma of redemption. Convinced of the immorality of nature in general, as well as of human nature, he is delighted to be able to

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 243-4.

⁷⁴ ELC, 76-8. (Essay written in 1890.)

⁷⁵ In his *Nouvelle correspondance*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, [n.d.], p. 123

tell us that Schopenhauer says:⁷⁶ "Morality is the contrary of nature."

His distrust of individualism is based on the belief that selfishness is the *primum mobile* of human conduct. Hence the insistence on an organized doctrine and discipline. As long as he believed that metaphysics could supply the necessary "obligation and sanction" for such a morality, he clung to the philosophy of Schopenhauer. When at length he abandoned this belief, he announced it in the too-famous article, *Après une visite au Vatican*,⁷⁷ which marked not only his apostasy from pure rationalism, but also from pure literature. Henceforth his efforts were divided between "literature and dogma," chiefly the latter.

Leading up to this final rupture, one can follow his progress step by step. The polemic with Lemaître and A. France concerning objective and impressionistic criticism (1891), despite the profusion of aesthetic theorizing which it involved, was promptly reduced by Brunetière to a matter of individual caprice *versus* the authority of rational analysis and traditional standards. Those who judge by personal taste are rejecting the accumulated wisdom of mankind in favor of their instinctive "impressions" or "reactions."

Do not morality and even, education consist, like criticism, in substituting motives of judgment and action other than those which are suggested to us by our "temperament," our instinct and our nature?⁷⁸

Individualism against authority, or license against restraint,—that is the great problem of modern society, as Brunetière saw it. And society, of course, has prior rights. His increasing preoccupation with social problems led the critic to question any activity which might tend to benefit the individual to the detriment of the social order. In 1893 he recanted on the subject of art for art's sake, and in a public lecture at the Sorbonne, formally retracted his allegiance to this theory. Art cannot be autonomous and irresponsible; it is a form of life and of action, for words express ideas, and ideas are the beginnings or the motives of action.⁷⁹ In short, art has influence upon society, and is therefore accountable to it. From this it is only a step to the position that art should be not merely neutral or harmless, but an active and purposeful influence for good. The social function of art! But for Brunetière "social" and "moral" were synonyms. He saw the dangers of such an attitude, and the next few years were filled with hesitation.

It was not merely a question of aesthetics which distressed him, but the metaphysical struggle between the conflicting sides of his nature. "If I did not overwhelm myself with work," he wrote⁸⁰ to a friend, "I should die of chagrin before the color of my thoughts." These thoughts, we know that they were "the only questions which really matter,—our origin, our nature, our destiny, and all the others which derive from

⁷⁶ ELC 71.

⁷⁷ RDM, Jan. 1, 1895, 4e période, tome CXXVII.

⁷⁸ ELC, 18.

⁷⁹ EPL, I, 26-31.

⁸⁰ P. Bourget, *op. cit.*, 290-91.

them."^{80a} Most immediate of these dependent problems is the question of morality,—a rule of conduct. This is the social question *par excellence*. Brunetière was beginning to doubt the efficacy of the purely rational solution offered by philosophy. It depended on individual consent, and even after being accepted by the individual, it lacked the external "obligation" or authority which alone could make it permanent in effectiveness, and universal in application. How can we depend upon it, if it depends upon us?

Round about him the intellectual life was seething with the ferment of social idealism. The early 'nineties were stirred with religious and humanitarian appeals. Vogüé's *Roman russe* had made fashionable the pity and the philanthropic sentiment of the Russian novelists. The ideas of Tolstoy, and presently those of Ibsen and Björnson, evoked wide interest and discussion. These idealistic and humanitarian currents are reflected in such various forms as the novel of Bourget, Feuillet, Rod, Huysmans and even Zola himself in his last works; the social drama of Brieux, the problem plays of Hervieu, CUREL and Lemaître, and the neo-Romanticism of Maeterlinck, Rostand and Coppée. In criticism especially the new trend was dominant, and Faguet, Larroumet, Pellissier, Wyzewa, Doumic, Desjardins and a host of minor critics became so concerned with social and moral problems that Brunetière ventured the prediction that criticism was about to take over the function, so long neglected by the novel, of being a "criticism of life," and thus broaden its scope enormously. This was not far removed from the conjecture of Anatole France that criticism would absorb all the other genres, and thus become the sole form of literature. Presently the great Anatole himself abdicated his attitude of "benevolent contempt" and his position as a spectator at the game of life, to become an active participant, the champion of Dreyfus and the defender of Socialism. The time of the ivory tower had passed, the spirit of the 'sixties was discredited.

The older generation was immune, of course, to the epidemic of idealism, spiritualism, mysticism,—as it was variously termed. Marcelin Berthelot could solemnly declare: "The world to-day is without mysteries",⁸¹ but the younger men would not believe him. In books, magazines, and newspapers, in lectures and discussions, the generation of 1870 joined with that of 1890 in a common effort to satisfy the yearnings of the heart. There were Neo-Catholic, Neo-Christian, Neo-Buddhist, Neo-Jewish movements; there were the "religion of human suffering," the morality of "social solidarity," Guyau's *Esquisse d'une morale sans obligation ni sanction*, and a curious combination called "spiritual socialism." All this ferment was accelerated when Leo XIII, in 1892, instructed the French clergy to "rally" to the support of the Republic, thus giving renewed evidence of the receptive attitude towards modern problems which he had so forcefully expressed, nine months before, in that ringing message, *Rerum novarum*. Orthodox priests, like the Abbé Félix Klein, approached the young sectarians to discuss terms of agreement. There was a common disposition to minimize the barriers of dogma, and to emphasize the community of ideals and aspirations. It was a time of eager expectation.

Some commentators have expressed astonishment that Brunetière should have

^{80a} SR, 19-20.

⁸¹ M. Berthelot, *les Origines de l'alchimie*, Paris, Steinheil, 1885, préface, p. 5.

chosen to intervene at this point. Yet it appears that it was perfectly natural, under the circumstances. Renan had died in 1892; Taine in 1893. Brunetière meanwhile was rising to such giddy heights as even his bold ambition had never dared to hope for. In the winter of 1891-92 he had made his début as a public lecturer with such brilliant success that many observers proclaimed that he had just discovered his true vocation.

This series of lectures at the Odéon was a triumph, still they did not suffice the lecturer, since he had not fully accomplished his work—the lectures being paid and a *théâtre* being the place of meeting. However successful this first campaign was, Brunetière had not yet founded the "free and gratuitous lesson." This he only accomplished in 1893, when the Sorbonne yielded and engaged him to speak in its great amphitheatre on the "Evolution of Lyric Poetry in the Nineteenth Century."⁸²

His success at the Sorbonne eclipsed even the triumph of the lectures at the Odéon, and was continued,—note the man's audacity,—when he chose Bossuet as his next subject.

During the three winter months of 1894 the most fashionable public of Paris was seen to forfeit its hour in the Bois and crowd in the corridors of the Sorbonne, at the risk of life (the crush was such that it was nothing less), as in 1891, 1892, and 1893 that same public had rushed to the Odéon. Since the famous "crushes" of the *Mariage de Figaro* nothing was ever seen to be compared with the course of lectures on Bossuet in 1894.⁸³

There are countless testimonials to Brunetière's prodigious talents as an orator, which were all the more remarkable in view of his physique.

Short, thin, nervous, of a puny and almost sickly appearance, he seems to have scarcely a breath of life; on seeing him no one would believe him capable of the astonishing activity which he has always maintained. ...

When for the first time you hear him speak, your surprise borders on amazement. I believe that never has a voice so deep, so powerful, so imperious, been lodged in a body so frail.⁸⁴

The foregoing was written in 1894, when Brunetière was at the pinnacle of his success. We are told that his fame attracted not only great crowds of listeners, but even students of elocution:

In public Brunetière was a marvellous *diseur*. ... His delivery was so perfect that at the famous lectures on Bossuet at the Sorbonne, Mme Pasca used to bring her young actors with her, to learn how to speak upon the stage. A propos of this, she used to quote the cry of Rachel hearing Guizot on the rostrum of the

⁸² Y. Blaze de Bury, *Fortnightly Review*, October 1, 1895, new series, vol. LVIII, p. 506.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁸⁴ V. Giraud, *MAA*, 193, 194.

Chamber of Deputies: "I should like to play tragedy with that man!"⁸⁵

⁸⁵ T. Delmont, *op. cit.*, 105-106.

An amusing parody of a Brunetière lecture was written by a number of his students at the Ecole Normale, and spoken by one of them (M. Edouard Herriot, apparently), who impersonated his master. This was a feature of the *Folies-Normaliennes*, presented in April, 1895, as the students' contribution to the centennial celebration of the founding of the Ecole Normale. It was inevitable that Brunetière should receive the lion's share of the satire, for his "Bankruptcy of Science" article was only three months old, and the notorious banquet had taken place only a fortnight before the celebration at the Ecole Normale.

F. Sarcey considered the *Folies-Normaliennes* good enough to merit a review in *le Temps*, which also published selections from the parody:

Mesdames et messieurs,

Prenant à cette heure la parole et la comptant garder quelques instants, pour vous présenter une revue que d'aimables artistes vont avoir le plaisir de jouer devant vous, si je ne débute point par les compliments d'usage, c'est que j'ai nettement senti que je vous dois des excuses avant tout. Vous les attendez, sans nul doute; et déjà vous vous étonniez qu'ayant quelques mots à vous adresser, et peut-être, au demeurant, quelques idées à vous soumettre, je ne vous eusse pas tout d'abord conviés à un banquet. Au fait, la chose eût été possible; nous eussions pu, vous et moi, couronnés de roses ou de lierre, nous asseoir en rond autour de quelque table, en quelque hospitalière auberge; nous eussions mangé pour ou contre quelqu'un, en l'honneur de telle ou telle idée; on vous eût servi, pour deux francs septante et cinq tout au plus, de médiocres victuailles assaisonnées d'excellents conseils; et, quand le diable y eût été, nous eussions bien trouvé, pour presider à la fête, quelque vieux diseur de bonne aventure politique, qui nous eût cité son Horace, et qui, sur la fin de l'agape, eût mis fort proprement ses deux pieds dans les plats.

Je ne l'ai point fait; et je pourrais bien, mesdames et messieurs, vous en donner ici mes raisons, si e'en était, à parler exactement, l'époque, ou si je ne préférerais m'en remettre sur ce point à votre indulgence, sur laquelle j'ai déjà si souvent compté.

[Après avoir montré qu'il y avait deux manières toutes naturelles de présenter la revue, le conférencier déclare en avoir choisi une troisième qu'il expose en ces termes:]

S'il est vrai, mesdames et messieurs,—et, pour ma part, je n'admets pas un instant ni le moins du monde qu'il en puisse être autrement,—qu'une oeuvre d'art n'est point intéressante en elle-même, par elle-même et pour elle-même; s'il est certain, j'irai plus avant, s'il paraît certain qu'une manifestation quelconque dans l'ordre de la production littéraire n'est digne d'égards qu'en tant qu'elle se range sous un titre ou, comme d'autres disent, sous une étiquette; si l'on doit et si l'on peut dire, d'autre part, qu'il y a des genres et que, poèmes épiques ou dramatiques, satires ou romans, drames ou revues, ces genres vont leur train, académique et régulier, aussi longtemps que rien n'en entrave le cours; si je ne sache pas d'ouvrage que l'on puisse séparer et en quelque manière isoler; pour toutes ces raisons et pour quelques autres, ce qu'il y a de remarquable, de considérable, au sens exact du mot, dans les deux actes de cette Revue, ce n'est point la pièce elle-même, avec son intrigue et son dialogue, mais c'est d'étudier, sur un exemple précis, ce qu'est à proprement parler le *genre*: Revue, et comment, un certain jour, il sortit d'un genre bien plus ancien, le *genre*: Poème épique.

L'évolution vous en paraît peut-être un peu forte, mesdames et messieurs; et sans doute je n'y contredis point; mais forte, l'est-elle plus ou même autant que l'évolution des autres genres que je vous ai déjà présentés? Aussi bien, qu'y a-t-il de si étonnant à voir les genres ainsi se transformer, puisque les écrivains que nous sommes changent eux-mêmes bien davantage; et puisqu'on a vu un auteur, qui se pique pourtant de quelque indépendance, après avoir cherché son inspiration première dans les cénacles du positivisme, après s'être réclamé de la science, aller liquider les quelques actions qui lui en restaient sur le marché de Rome et dans les couloirs du Vatican?

(*Le Temps*, April 19, 1895.)

There was nothing theatrical about his delivery, for all that, and he won his listeners wholly by logic and by the moving intensity of his manner:

No compliments and no lofty images; no formidable flights of oratory; no ringing outburst; [almost] no gestures. ... "Very little to fire the imagination, and nothing to stir the heart." But from the first words, his audience was won over. ...⁸⁶

So many negatives make it hard for us to realize how he could hold his audiences spellbound, especially since his printed speeches seem so purely rational as to be almost scholastic. His contemporaries realized that his fame as an orator could not survive the man:

M. de Vogüé is right in saying that posterity will no more understand "the sovereign power of Brunetière over his audience than we understand the enthusiasm of our ancestors for the eloquence of Berryer, Lacordaire, Victor Cousin." Their written word, like that of Brunetière, is molten lava which has cooled and hardened.⁸⁷

We who have not heard him can only accept the word of his listeners, who frequently fall back on the analogy with the "flaming logic of Pascal," and assure us that the peculiar intensity of Brunetière's delivery communicated a moving sense of conviction which never failed to hypnotize his hearers. There was certainly an apostolic fervor in the man's expression, and not a little of the apostle's belief in the fated character of his own mission. This was encouraged by his phenomenal success in swaying those vast audiences, and by the public assurances of fellow-critics that he was the successor of Taine and Renan, "the master of contemporary thought."⁸⁸

Critical choice and popular acclamation were confirmed in 1893 by his election to the Academy, and in 1894, when simultaneously he was offered the directorship of the two publications, the *Revue de Paris* and the *Revue des deux mondes*. In the case of the latter it had been necessary to alter the by-laws of the corporation, which prohibited a member of the association from being elevated to the Directorship. Brunetière was aware of the honor thus done him, and accepted the offer.

⁸⁶ T. Delmont, *op. cit.*, 109.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

This situation has given rise to a paradoxical argument advanced in a recent dissertation which is generally unfavorable to Brunetière. Its author, who maintains that the critic's logic was habitually defective, and who yet cannot disregard the countless testimonials to the man's position of great influence and authority, solves the dilemma by suggesting that Brunetière's eminence was attained by means of his oratorical gifts: his contemporaries were simply carried away by his eloquence. (Cf. W. Jéquier, *F. Brunetière et la critique littéraire*, Lausanne, 1922, pp. 150-152.)

The argument is more ingenious than convincing. No doubt it is true to a limited degree, but it should be remembered that Brunetière first spoke in public in 1891, when his name and fame were already assured.

⁸⁸ V. Giraud, MAA, 202. (These words were written in 1894. Similar expressions by other writers were not rare.)

His was a position of acknowledged influence and authority attained by perhaps no other man of letters of his time. To Brunetière, at the age of forty-five, it was not the climax of a brilliant career; he saw it rather as a starting-point. To him it seemed a call to wider influence,—at once a vindication and a challenge.

The revelation of his oratorical prowess had made him, almost overnight, the foremost public speaker in the land. Immediately there was a strong demand for his services at public and private meetings, and despite the superhuman effort it required,—for he had relinquished none of his duties as he acquired new ones,—he found the time and energy to fill many such engagements. The rostrum drew him irresistibly. The sight of up-turned faces,—hundreds of them,—which in the yellow lamplight seemed like wax, impressed by his imperious persuasion, aglow with his communicative warmth,—this was the sight which thrilled him most profoundly, the proof that men were subject to his power. It was not merely the gratification of the elemental urge to rule others, though doubtless there was not a little of this in Brunetière, but also the Mosaic inspiration of leading his people.

Unlike Moses, however, the critic lacked divine guidance, and the philosophy of Schopenhauer, which had been his pillar of cloud in the lucid light of his rationalism, vanished in the night of his metaphysical doubts. It was a very trying position for a leader, betraying the lack of a fixed centre of belief. The longing for such a centre, the confused groping for it, and the man's final discouragement after a quest which had lasted so long, are all evident in a public address of 1894:

... it is not proved that our faith is not within our power, and perhaps we are the masters of our belief in exactly the measure that we are masters of our will. ... Who ever decreed that when we cease devout adherence to the teachings of religion, the words *belief* and *faith* become empty, meaningless? Heaven forbid!

...

So let us be satisfied with the certitudes of history. ... Since no more is needed to reveal in us something more than ourselves, then nothing more is needed to save us from self-worship, *et hæc est victoria qua vincit mundum, fides nostra*. The true faith, that which will conquer selfishness and instill in us the generous ardor of action, is the faith of the individual in the destinies of the species. ...

So let us believe what we can, but let us believe something, since we know that no more is needed for action. In default of any other belief, let us make a faith of this need of action which is the very law of humanity, since, after all, inaction and death are the same thing. Let us not obscure the matter with useless metaphysics.

... And I do not know, as people used to say, and as I hope,

Si le siècle qui vient verra de grandes choses,

but at least we shall not have failed our masters, or France, or humanity.⁸⁹

"Useless metaphysics" is noteworthy, as is also "but let us believe something," even if it is only "the faith of the individual in the destinies of the species." It is the need

⁸⁹ DA, 48, 49-50, 51.

to believe, the need for a governing faith, which haunts him so poignantly, and it is evident that, try as he will, he is scarcely satisfied with the positivistic "faith of the individual in the destinies of the species."

In October of the same year, Brunetière set out for Rome, where he was granted an audience by Pope Leo XIII.⁹⁰ Doubtless we shall never know what took place at this meeting. It seems certain, however, that its influence was decisive.

M. Brunetière returned from Rome; he had seen the Pope, a Pope who aroused such enthusiasm that some people turned to Christ because His vicar had personally fascinated them.⁹¹

Such is the broad hint given by Georges Goyau, a prominent Catholic apologist and contemporary of Brunetière, well acquainted with the critic's thought, and his firm defender. Another testimonial, more outspoken and quite authoritative, is that of M. Giraud, Brunetière's pupil and chosen associate, who speaks of the "personal fascination" of Leo XIII on Brunetière.⁹² The title of the famous article, finally, is *Après une visite au Vatican*.⁹³ And while it is true that the author "denies that a single word is related to his conversation with the Holy Father,"⁹⁴ the disclaimer is obviously overscrupulous and exaggerated. He was not the official spokesman of the Pope, of course, but his article was inspired by the interview at Rome, and the title can mean nothing else.⁹⁵

That much, at least, was immediately evident to everybody who read the article,—and everybody read it. Appearing quite appropriately on New Year's Day, it provoked a storm of scandal and controversy. "Everyone agreed in making of the publication of this simple article an intellectual event as great as the appearance, thirty years before, of *la Vie de Jésus*."⁹⁶ It was indeed a kind of reply to Renan's "testament," *l'Avenir de la science*, published five years previously.

Brunetière's intent was to proclaim a sort of unofficial concordat between science and religion, in the interest of society and morality. The indignant refutations by

⁹⁰ Curiously enough, Zola was there at the same time, gathering material for his *Rome*.

⁹¹ G. Goyau (Léon Grégoire), *Autour du catholicisme social*, 3 vols., 1897-1907, Paris, Perrin, vol. III, pp. 285-6.

⁹² V. Giraud, MAA, 230. Cf. *ibid.*, 217.

⁹³ RDM, Jan. 1, 1895, 4e période, tome CXXVII. Three months later this article was reprinted separately, under the title *la Science et la religion*. (Cf. *supra*, note 66.) Subsequently it was again reprinted in his: *Questions actuelles*, Paris, Perrin, 1916, (which will be designated *infra* as QA). Since the text and footnotes are most complete in the separate edition (SR), references will be made to this edition exclusively.

⁹⁴ SR, 9 n.

⁹⁵ If there were any doubt of this it is dispelled by a confidential note which tells of the famous interview. "Finally, he [the Pope] questioned me about the *Revue des deux mondes*. ... I understood that he would be pleased to have an echo of his conversation return to him.

"Once back at Paris, nothing could suit me better than to satisfy a desire whose expression honored me, and which moreover fitted with the need which I had felt, for some time, to explain myself on questions which had preoccupied me for ten years." (V. Giraud, MH. I, 98.)

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 105.

Berthelot and other scientists, and the haughty disavowal by Mgr. d'Hulst soon made it clear that the way of the peacemaker is hard. "The Bankruptcy of Science," as the article was popularly called, earned its writer more enemies than all the polemics of his twenty-year career. By the scientists he was called a traitor; by the Catholics, an ignorant intruder; by the spokesmen for "youth movements" he was bitterly assailed as a bungling meddler who had upset all their plans just when they were about to be fulfilled.

Despite the many misinterpretations (sometimes willful) of the article, its true significance is easily discovered. It lies in the author's formal repudiation of that positivism which had heretofore made him reject religion in the name of science. It is postulated on the "different orders" of Pascal; it affirms that rational considerations, such as biology, archaeology, history, exegesis, metaphysics are powerless to invalidate the certitudes of faith, "for that is of another order,—moral."^{96a} Each order has its own province, separate and inviolable. Such being the case, let us cease to oppose the one to the other; let us rather make the most of both. Let us abandon the idle dream of replacing religion with philosophy or with science;⁹⁷ let us face the situation honestly and practically. History proves the unique power of Christianity as a social and moral force. The moral crisis and the social unrest of the present day are caused by the abandonment of religion. Let us return then to Catholicism, for it alone is a complete discipline, unweakened by the rationalist compromises of the Protestant doctrines. Protestantism, with its emphasis on individual salvation, is a personal and individual matter, poorly calculated to combat the individualism and selfishness which constitute the major social problem of to-day.

The conclusion is evident. When we are agreed upon three or four points of such importance, there is not even any need of discussing the conditions or terms of an agreement; it is completed. ... It would be a kind of crime ... to try to divide people thus agreeing, for reasons of exegesis or geology. And even supposing that social progress were at the price of a passing sacrifice,—which would cost nothing to our independence or our dignity, but only to our vanity,—

^{96a} Quoted from Brunetière, DC, II, 81.

⁹⁷ Rather than collect mere scattered statements to show Brunetière's contradictions of self, this study attempts to follow his thought chronologically, and to account for its evolutions. The reactionary attitude adopted in his last years derives from the philosophical *volte-face* attested in the above article, and this in turn is motivated by social considerations. A further proof, if one were needed, of the man's intense interest in such matters is furnished by a letter written in 1898 to M. Giraud: "I no longer believe in the possibility of a *purely lay* morality, and I no longer believe in it because I once did believe in it more firmly than others, whose good faith I surely do not question, but over whom I claim the advantage of having three times brought up the question for re-examination, each time under conditions of absolute disinterestedness." (*Ibid.*, 104.)

The first "re-examination" probably dates from 1889 (*cf. supra*, p. 39 *et seq.*), for we have Brunetière's statement in the same letter: "It is true that I renewed my religious education about 1889." (*Ibid.*, 98.)

As late as 1892 he wrote, "It is essential, for two or three compelling reasons, that morality be completely freed from religion." F. Brunetière, *Etudes critiques sur l'histoire de la littérature française*, Paris, Hachette, vol. V, 2e édition, 1896, p. 182. (Will be designated *infra* as EC.)

The weakening of this conviction is evident in 1894 (*cf. supra*, p. 51), and its reversal, motivated by Leo XIII, is proclaimed Jan. 1, 1895 in *Après une visite au Vatican*.

hesitation would not be permissible. One must live first of all, and life is not contemplation or speculation, but action. The patient snaps his fingers at the rules, if only he can be cured. When the house is burning, the only concern of its inhabitants is to put out the fire. Or if you wish a nobler metaphor ... it is neither the time nor the place to oppose the caprice of the individual to the rights of the community, when one is on the battlefield.⁹⁸

This conclusion well illustrates the man's pragmatic approach to Catholicism. It is strongly reminiscent of his appeal, a few months before:⁹⁹ "Let us believe what we can, but let us believe something, since we know that no more is needed for action." It is social action that he is concerned with, and now he has decided that Catholicism is the most potent instrument of reform.

To combat these doctrines (individualism, dilettantism, internationalism) I sought a *point d'appui*, and after vainly searching for it in the teachings of science or philosophy, I found it in Catholicism, and only in Catholicism. Yes, only in it did I find the ally which we need against individualism. ... From the day when this evidence appeared to me clearly I declared myself a Catholic.¹⁰⁰

Commentators were quick to point out that he was preaching a faith which he did not himself possess. Yet he was not wholly illogical, for he was trying to prove that science and faith (or reason and faith,—they were the same to him) were not inimical, and that we should cooperate with those who have the faith, while waiting for it to be visited upon us.

This treatment of the matter of faith was what caused censure by the Church. His rational opposition to religion he has overcome by setting up two orders, the one rational, the other irrational or supra-rational. Faith, he maintains, is of the latter order, and therefore costs no sacrifice of reason.

You cannot prove the divinity of Christ; you affirm it or you deny it; you believe it or you disbelieve it, and likewise the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God.¹⁰¹

Mgr. d'Hulst replied sharply:

M. Brunetière has no more conception of the real nature of faith than M. Taine. He confuses it with a kind of mystical enthusiasm ... indistinguishable from the visions of a fanatic ... or a sacred delirium like that of the pythoness. . . . This ignorance of the nature of faith. ... The lacunae in his philosophy. ...

His great ignorance of theology. ...¹⁰²

⁹⁸ SR, 92-93 (conclusion).

⁹⁹ Cf. *supra*, p. 52.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted from V. Giraud, MH, I, 105.

¹⁰¹ SR, 59.

¹⁰² Quoted from A. Baudrillart, *Vie de Mgr. d'Hulst*, Paris, Poussielgue, 1914, vol. II, pp. 199-203.

Unused to such harsh treatment from high places, Brunetière replied with some asperity. His statement is of the utmost importance for a consideration of his belief:

Nowhere have I said that "one believes without reasons for belief," but it does not appear to me that this "reason" or these "reasons" are of the intellectual order. One believes because one *wants* to believe, for reasons of the moral order; because one feels the need of a rule, and because neither nature nor man can find such a rule within. But what is difficult or impossible is to give to oneself the sentiment of this need, and it is in this sense that we cannot achieve faith by ourselves.¹⁰³

This was denounced as heresy,—fideism,—¹⁰⁴ and one understands why the clergy could not support their new champion. He had granted reason and experience to science, and only faith,—a highly questionable faith,—to religion. Writing in 1897, a distinguished Catholic writer commented:¹⁰⁵ "Too eager to reconcile science and religion, M. Brunetière had thought of nothing better than separating them completely. ... We could not accept this ruinous division."

This complete separation is fundamental in Brunetière's conception of Catholicism, and he never publicly disavowed it. He had, to the amazement of the public, thrown his support to the Church, and he was considerably annoyed at being rebuffed instead of welcomed. And for such reasons! It seemed to him that the Church was needlessly emphasizing the "obstacles to belief," and that his "social reasons," sincerely presented, outweighed mere scholastic subtleties. He speaks angrily of "great prelates who are also great bunglers," and one is reminded of his article on Bossuet, written a few years previously, in which he praises the great bishop for minimizing the controversial question of the Immaculate Conception. Bossuet believed in it, but, the critic tells us, openly maintained that it was "unimportant. ... and irrelevant to faith," and that there was no reason, therefore, to consider it a barrier to belief. Brunetière comments ironically:

And now in the nineteenth century, the obstacles to belief having no doubt diminished, the Roman Church has made a new dogma of this "non-essential point!"¹⁰⁶

Despite the rebuffs, the uproar and the insults, and indeed somewhat because of them, he determined to continue. The magnitude of the scandal caused by his article was proof of its influence, as Brunetière observed in a special newspaper article which appeared the day of the famous banquet:

¹⁰³ SR, 59 n.

¹⁰⁴ Bearing the *Imprimatur* and the personal commendation of the archbishop of Cambrai, the book of a Catholic theologian contains these judgments of Brunetière's conception of faith: "Thus it is in absolute contradiction with the teaching of the Church ..." "It is unadulterated fideism." (J. -A. Chollet, *les Idées religieuses de M. Brunetière*, Paris, P. Lethielleux, [n.d.], pp. 99, 102.)

¹⁰⁵ H. Bremond, *l'Inquiétude religieuse*, Paris, Perrin, 1909, vol. I, pp. 94-95.

¹⁰⁶ EC, VI (1899), p. 237. The article on Bossuet was written in 1888. The reference to "great bunglers" is found in *le Figaro*, April 4, 1895.

After all, there are few people *against* whom banquets are organized, and I am not a little proud to be the first one since King Louis Philippe!¹⁰⁷

In all truth, the banquet was a rather vulgar display of mob psychology, and its philosophical fare smacked of politics rather than of Plato. Berthelot had the good sense to see that things were getting out of hand, and he formally disavowed, in a newspaper notice, a whole series of banquets that was being planned. His philosophical competence, however, was far inferior to that of his opponent. Brunetière's "attack upon science" had consisted merely in noting that the progress of morality had not kept up with the progress of science, contrary to the promises made in the name of science, by the eighteenth-century philosophers and the nineteenth-century scientists.¹⁰⁸ Berthelot and his colleagues then played directly into Brunetière's hand by making claims and promises more sweeping even than those of Condorcet and Renan. The philosopher Alfred Fouillée aptly remarked:¹⁰⁹ "Unfortunately for science, its cause was defended by the scientists."

Brunetière was not to be dissuaded by the paltry arguments of the scientists, or by the abuse of politicians like Georges Clemenceau.

Doctor Clemenceau, who on Monday calls me "a sour-tempered pedant" in his newspaper, and on Tuesday sends me his books, with a flattering inscription.¹¹⁰

The clamor of the public, the vituperation of the press, and even the treachery of some of his old friends certainly caused him great pain, for his friends all assert that he was keenly sensitive. But still he would not yield. Whatever we may think of his opinions, we must admire him as a courageous and loyal fighter. He felt that social progress was at stake, and that it was his duty as a molder of public opinion to lead the good fight for moral regeneration and social uplift. Without hesitation he withdrew from the Ecole Normale, cut his literary work by half, and embarked on his new career. The next few years were occupied with writings in the fields of apologetics, sociology and even politics; with a prodigious amount of study of these subjects; and with a continuous round of public lectures which took him to the principal cities and universities of southern and central Europe, eastern Canada, and the United States.

We can better appreciate the moral courage and iron will required for such a program, made doubly difficult by public opprobrium, when we realize that it was deliberately chosen at the cost of his health,—it is no exaggeration to say, at the cost of several years of his life.¹¹¹ Early in 1896 newspapers reported that he was dangerously ill

¹⁰⁷ *Le Figaro*, April 4, 1895. (Reprinted in QA, 66 *et seq.*)

¹⁰⁸ The title "Bankruptcy of Science" is a misnomer. Brunetière did not use the term. He considers the word *banqueroute*, then withdraws it in favor of *faillites partielles*. (Cf. SR, 36.)

¹⁰⁹ A. Fouillée, *le Mouvement idéaliste et la réaction contre la science positive*, Paris, Alcan, 1896, Introduction, p. 33.

¹¹⁰ *Le Figaro*, April 4, 1895.

¹¹¹ M. Bourget says flatly: "This drain of his energy, continued since his youth, killed Brunetière." (*Op. cit.*, 292.)

and was to be examined by Dr. Potain, of the Institute. Charles Brunetière wrote to his brother in alarm. The answer:

My dear Charles:

I thank you for your letter, and I hasten to reply that the papers have, as usual, greatly exaggerated things. For the last six months I have been in bad health, and I have been unable to throw off an attack of bronchitis which seized me last December. It is possible that it is becoming chronic or even mortal, but that is nothing to worry about, or even think about, for the present at least.

At any rate, the examination by Potain is a pure *fiction of the papers*, and I do not even know the features of my illustrious colleague. When the time comes for such a thing I shall not call upon Potain or any other famous specialist, and if medicine can afford me any relief, the least of our neighborhood physicians will be good enough to prescribe for me. Meanwhile, all things have their price, and one cannot lead the life of a cab-horse or galley-slave, as I have done for the last twenty-five years, without finally feeling the consequences. "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," is a proverbial phrase from *Hamlet*: something is *broken* in me. That is all!

Your brother
Ferdinand.¹¹²

Broken in health, but not in spirit, he was concerned with saving the social order, rather than his own physique. Never had his stoic disdain of the flesh met such a severe test. The tireless energy of this sickly athlete was a shining example of sheer pluck. We cannot be surprised that he always maintained that "ideas make the world go 'round"; for him, they did.

The new orientation of his ideas and his career was naturally reflected in his critical work. He had not entirely abdicated the kingdom of letters, but it was definitely a secondary interest henceforth, and his literary criticism became pervaded with his new preoccupations, so much so that it is hard to draw the line between some of his works of criticism and those of propaganda. A leading influence at this period is the idea that democracy is the fated and ineluctable order of modern society, to be accepted unreservedly, and perfected by the loyal collaboration of all classes.¹¹³ Animated by this thought, he attacks those writers whose influence would obstruct this "natural evolution." Those of "aristocratic" tendencies, such as Renan, Voltaire, Nietzsche, he assails with increasing ferocity.

As he approached Catholicism (he did not openly embrace it until 1900), he became increasingly convinced of a spiritual affinity between Catholicism and

¹¹² C. Brunetière, *op. cit.*, 32.

¹¹³ The influence of Tocqueville is evident here, combined with a sort of historical determinism or pragmatism always characteristic of Brunetière. It is similar to the attitude which made him choose Catholicism for France because of its historical record as a unique moralizing force. Cf. SR, *passim*.

democracy, and he was fond of repeating the words of Leo XIII:¹¹⁴ "Be good Catholics and you will be excellent democrats." Following his thought to its uttermost conclusions, he decided that one could not be the one without also being the other. A related exaggeration is his temporary mingling of Catholicism and patriotism.¹¹⁵

The results of such doctrinal bias are only too evident in the critical works after 1895. It goes without saying that such considerations, passionately prosecuted, were fatal to the Olympian objectivity which the critic had so long striven for, and to an honorable degree, attained. The bitter attacks upon Renan, the vitriolic abuse of Flaubert, are well known examples. They are not to be condoned by saying that they are directed only at the ideas and influence of these men. Brunetière was thoroughly convinced, by this time, that art has a social and moral function, and that artistry, ideas, and influence are so inextricably commingled that they cannot be considered separately. The whole structure of his philosophy of art was upset by his evangelistic doctrines. "L'Art et la morale" (1898)¹¹⁶ is a Jansenist tract which convicts all forms of art of an innate tendency towards immorality that can only be overcome by minimizing the importance of its artistic form, and by emphasizing its social and moral purpose. In the course of this lecture he declaimed, in his best manner, the ringing verses of Leconte de Lisle:

Mais la beauté flamboie, et tout renaît en elle,
Et les mondes encor roulent sous ses pieds blancs!

This was greeted with a burst of applause. When it had subsided the speaker announced firmly: *Je ne suis pas de cet avis*.

He had formerly been of that opinion, and the violence of his reaction is the fury of the renegade. If we would measure the distance that he has come (or retrograded), we have only to compare the petulant taunts of this period¹¹⁷ with a youthful, somewhat Romantic article on "le Mai du siècle," which enthusiastically exculpates the Romantic poets from moral strictures, and denounces the moralizing attitude as "anti-literary and inhuman."¹¹⁸

Justice requires that one should note here what has often been overlooked, namely that Brunetière did not profess to follow Tolstoy and Taine in making "the degree of beneficence" the criterion of artistic value. He denies that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is literature, and declines to rank *Pamela* and *Grandison* as highly as Taine had done. His position is that these works are faulty, not because of their moral preoccupations, but because of insufficient artistry. He calls for an art that shall combine moral and aesthetic value. Such

¹¹⁴ Cf. F. Brunetière, *Lettres de combat*, Paris, Perrin, 1912, pp. 119-20. Pius VII is generally thought to have originated this expression.

¹¹⁵ Cf. "les Ennemis de l'âme française," in DC, I.

¹¹⁶ Published in DC, I.

¹¹⁷ "A little indulgence, ye great artists! ... It would cost us relatively little to be deprived of you! But how ... could you live ... were it not for these Bouvard and Pécuchet for whom you have not enough scorn and derision?" (*Ibid.*, 102-3.)

¹¹⁸ F. Brunetière, *Histoire et littérature* Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 3 vols., vol. I (1898), p. 324. (Will be designated *infra* as HL.)

a program is questionable, especially when we hear him accepting the claims of the younger Dumas for *utilitarian* art, and making the statement, "Tolstoy and I are fighting the same battle."¹¹⁹

Our suspicions are justified when he indicts the morality of La Fontaine's fables and Racine's tragedies. It would be an easy matter to multiply examples, but it is wiser to follow his own dictum that one proof is as good as a hundred. It should merely be added that the late M. Hauvette quite refuted Brunetière's over-simplified and partisan presentation of the Italian Renaissance as an explosion of pure paganism and animality.¹²⁰ Similarly, Irving Babbitt has said all that was necessary concerning Brunetière's denunciation of Greek civilization and its representatives, especially Plato.¹²¹ These defiant paradoxes are all motivated by the conviction that "social and moral" utility is the final aim and arbiter of all human activity, be it politics, art, education, science, philosophy, religion.

Whenever a doctrine ends, by way of logical consequence, in questioning the principles on which society rests, it is false, make no mistake about that.¹²²

It is this obsession which dictated his attitude upon such varied subjects as the Pléiade, contemporary pedagogy, Fénelon's mysticism, the Dreyfus affair, the dilettantism of Renan and A. France, the determinism of Taine, the poetry of Baudelaire, and even the belief of the individual in philosophy and religion.

"Were you certain that man is not free ... you ought not to say so, since the social polity and all morality rest on the hypothesis or the postulate of liberty as on their sole foundation."¹²³

It may seem surprising that Brunetière's pragmatic sanction and defense of Catholicism should have been accepted and encouraged by orthodox leaders. The active hostility of Mgr. d'Hulst was shared by only a few prelates; most of the clergy held their tongue, and many of them openly welcomed the support of their new ally. The advantage of his powerful influence is not the sole explanation; though Brunetière was frankly an unbeliever still, his supporters had reason to hope that presently the revelation of faith would come to him, to legitimize his premature expression. Most important of all, however, was the apparent, though tacit, approval of Leo XIII. Despite Brunetière's disclaimer of any papal inspiration, the impression persisted that he was encouraged by Rome. The title, *Après une visite au Vatican*, suggested this, and the impression was strengthened, a few weeks later, by a newspaper article which detailed another interview

¹¹⁹ Cf. DC, I, 32-34, 97, 108-9; *Manual of the History of French Literature*, (authorized translation by Ralph Derechef), New York, Crowell, [n.d.], pp. 525-530. (Will be designated *infra* as *Manual*.)

¹²⁰ H. Hauvette, "F. Brunetière, Histoire de la littérature française classique (1515-1830), tome 1er, première et seconde parties," *Revue critique*, July 8, 1905, nouvelle série, tome LX, pp. 14-20.

¹²¹ L. Babbitt, *op. cit.*, 301-2.

¹²² F. Brunetière, *Nouvelles questions de critique*, Paris, Calmann-Lévy, 1898, p. 342. (Will be designated *infra* as NQC.)

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 334.

with the Pope.¹²⁴ Questioned as to whether Brunetière had "correctly rendered his thought," the Pontiff avoided a direct answer, but exposed at some length the tenor of his conversation with the critic. The Pope's words, as here reported, parallel closely those of Brunetière in his famous article.

Finally, there is the obvious fact that if Leo XIII had found Brunetière's ideas distasteful, or his influence questionable, it would have been a simple matter to halt them. He did not choose to do so, and as long as the Pope lived, Brunetière had complete liberty to campaign for the Church in any way he pleased.¹²⁵

This liberty was fully exercised. In widely circulated tracts, and in dozens of addresses to "Catholic Youth" societies and workingmen's clubs, he broadcast his paradoxical arguments. He clung to his belief in evolution, repeating his parallel with the dogma of original sin, and maintained that the one confirmed the other.¹²⁶ He justified his modernist interpretations of dogmas by the same doctrine, though a few years before (1891), he had vigorously denied such an application of it.

It is in vain that they speak of the "evolution of dogmas"; it is only a word by which they deceive themselves. There is no evolution without a change in kind, and a dogma which evolves ceases thereby to be a dogma.¹²⁷

In fact, his whole campaign for a modern "social Catholicism" is based on this idea of evolution, and he even maintains that a single dogma may be variously interpreted in order to meet the exigencies of changing conditions. Nevertheless, he condemns the slightest alteration of the doctrine of the Fathers:

No one, neither Pope nor Council, had the right, for any reason whatever, to add an article to, or to retrench an iota from it.¹²⁸

This enemy of individualism evidently intends to preserve the independence of his own opinions. Similarly, his early repugnance to mystical effusions has not changed a jot. He condemns, in the name of Bossuet:

¹²⁴ "M. Vigne (d'Octon) et Léon XIII," in *le Temps*, Feb. 8, 1895.

¹²⁵ It is known that Brunetière was granted at least four audiences by Leo XIII during the last eight years of the latter's life. (*Cf. Lettres de combat*, p. 115. This article, "Sur Léon XIII," bears striking proof of their community of thought and interests.)

¹²⁶ Brunetière's dogged persistence in reiterating such ideas earned him the vigorous opposition of a considerable portion of the clergy. It should be noted that the controversy continued after his public profession of faith (1900). *La Quinzaine* charged him with fideism, and the Abbé Delmont objected in *la Vérité française* (Nov. 1901), to the critic's unorthodox apologetics, taking exception especially to the Darwinian arguments. Brunetière replied in a footnote: *Il est difficile de se faire comprendre*. (DC, II, 163 n.)

"I had understood him only too well," retorted the Abbé Delmont, "and I was merely the echo of those who had heard him pervert the dogma of original sin and the doctrine of Saint Augustine." (T. Delmont, *op. cit.*, 166.)

¹²⁷ F. Brunetière, *Bossuet*, Paris, Hachette, 1913, p. 87.

¹²⁸ EC, VI, 243.

... the indecent scenes at the Saint-Médard cemetery ... the miracles at Lourdes and at Lorette ... the superstitious devotion to the Bleeding and Sacred Heart of Jesus, on the visions of a Marie Alacoque.¹²⁹

"These words are harsh; a sectarian Protestant would use no harsher," comments a contemporary.¹³⁰

Such expressions of open revolt ceased after 1900, when Brunetière finally joined the Church, but he seems never to have abandoned the debatable idea that had so scandalized Mgr. d'Hulst in 1895, namely that there is no proof of the supernatural, and that faith is utterly separated from reason. It is maintained even in his public profession of faith at Lille, in 1900, before the Catholic Congress of the North:

... to those who would ask me for something ... more explicit, I should reply: "What I *believe*,—and I stress this word heavily,—what I *believe*,—not what I *suppose* or *imagine*, and not what I *know* or *understand*, but what I *believe*,—go ask it of Rome."¹³¹

The word was at once broadcast throughout the land, and other lands, that the editor of the *Revue des deux mondes* was at last converted. And that is indeed what he had meant. Commenting on the wording, Brunetière's successor at the Academy says:

Peculiar as this form of declaration may be, we should wrong M. Brunetière if we did not interpret it as a categorical adherence to the faith of the Roman Catholic Church.¹³²

Barboux is right. No serious person has questioned Brunetière's sincerity, and his profession of faith, curious though it be, is a sincere declaration. It tells us, with evident satisfaction, that he has the faith, and it maintains the position that faith is not a matter of intellect.

It was not the faith of a Pascal, as Irving Babbitt has observed, and one would search in vain for a trace of mystic fervor. Yet he imagined himself Pascal's successor, and embarked on a work of formal apologetics which should complete the purpose of the fragmentary *Pensées*. This modern version, however, was to be an application of Schopenhauer's pessimism and Darwinian evolution to Auguste Comte's positivism!

Multæ sunt mansiones is a phrase that Brunetière was fond of repeating and interpreting, usually in a spirit of admiration for the Church's ability to "absorb its heresies."¹³³ He speaks as one who should know. The absorption seems not to have been

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 242. The article is of 1888, and the first edition of EC, VI, appeared in 1898.

¹³⁰ C Bastide, in *Fortnightly Review*, September 1, 1899, new series, vol. LXVI. p. 508.

¹³¹ DC, II, 43.

¹³² H. Barboux, in *Recueil des discours ... de l'Académie Française*, p. 429.

¹³³ "I still admire Darwin and A. Comte. I admire them so much that after spending some thirty years of my life in 'converting them into blood and sinew,' as an old author says, I have decided to use the

complete, however, for a portion of Catholic France still looked with suspicion upon the new "Church Father," as one enthusiastic prelate^{133a} called him. In all truth, he was only a step-father, and his neo-scholasticism, clothed in Darwin's vocabulary, brought little solace to his adoptive children. He believed too much that "ideas govern the world," his successor at the Academy tells us, and he did not realize that it is interests and passions which do so. Hence his faith, increasing with the years, in the omnipotence of dialectic and reasoning.

It is the height of illusion to believe that one can convert men by reasoning. I am sure that the powerful and imperious logic of M. Brunetière inflamed many men who were long since convinced; I like to believe it stirred many unbelievers; but I doubt that it subjugated them. Why? Because any religion is a consolation and syllogisms console nobody.¹³⁴

If his sincere and courageous propaganda was thus sterile, despite the spell of his eloquence, it can only be, as Barboux suggests, that the speaker himself lacked what he could not communicate:

Incapable of enjoying the repose of a faith so laboriously conquered, he seemed to be still groping after the search was ended.¹³⁵

That is keenly observed. Repose, the calm serenity of faith, are wholly lacking from his apologia. His friends were in agreement that he never knew repose.

What he did find and advocate in Catholicism was a "discipline,"—the obligation and sanction of a rule of conduct. Reason was not sacrificed to faith, but divorced from it. Faith, in turn, was achieved by an act of the will. Such a system is noble in motive, and does credit to the man's probity, but no amount of rhetorical magic could make it a popular evangel.¹³⁶

Encouraged by his apparent success, spurred on by his sense of duty and love of combat, the fiery crusader multiplied his activities. His cumulative successes in various

rest of my days in drawing from the *Origin of Species* and the *Cours de philosophie positive* the basis of a new apologetics. I realize that people will consider it as bold as it is new, but I am none the less hopeful and confident of its success." (DC, II, 3 n.)

^{133a} Cardinal Mathieu.

¹³⁴ H. Barboux, in *Recueil des discours . . . de l'Académie Française*, p. 432.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹³⁶ In an interview which he was kind enough to grant me, M. Giraud related an incident which well illustrates this fact. In 1901 Brunetière was invited to speak at Geneva, and he accepted, choosing to speak on Calvin. His ideas on the subject were well known, and it was not to be expected that he would modify them for the sake of diplomacy. When he mounted the platform he faced an immense audience which was openly hostile. He wavered not at all, and his address was a masterpiece of bold criticism and clever argument. From his first words, the audience was dominated. Forcefully, yet tactfully, he proceeded to convict his listeners of egoistic principles and aristocratic spirit, and still they remained spellbound. It was a triumph of oratorical power. Yet it is not to be supposed that his Calvinist listeners were converted to Catholicism. It is another illustration of the old saying: *Tu ne me persuaderas pas, quand même tu me convaincras*.

fields had made him a light in the social world, and soon he became a prominent figure in the literary salons of Mme Aubernon and Mme de Loynes. The former had a marked political tendency, and Mme Aubernon and her niece were so republican that they were called *les précieuses radicates*. The salon of Mme de Loynes was more elegant, and famed for its epicurean table. Here was founded, in 1899, the famous *Ligue de la Patrie Française*, with Brunetière as a leading influence. Other leaders were Lemaître (first president), Coppée, Déroulède, Houssaye, Vandal, Forain, Detaille. The *Ligue* was a product of the Dreyfus affair, which split France into two bitterly opposed camps, and quite engulfed the rosy "renaissance of idealism," so hopefully proclaimed a few years before.¹³⁷

Brunetière felt called upon to take an active part in the *Affaire*, which for him was simply another and more striking episode in the revolt of individualism against the sacred prerogatives of Society.¹³⁸ He made a vigorous campaign in the provinces, and feeling ran so high that strong police guards were required to protect him,—a fact which illustrates the effectiveness of his oratorical power, and the extent to which he was feared by his enemies. Returning to Paris, he was busier than ever. The salon of Mme de Loynes was known as a *fabrique d'Académiciens*, and of course Brunetière was the moving spirit in this, though Lemaître was the social lion. This salon used its influence to elect Donnay, the Marquis de Ségur, Faguet, E. Lamy, Henri Roujon. The influence of this coterie was known to be so great that political enemies who were not on speaking terms observed truces in order to be present. One could have seen there, at the same time, Clemenceau and Rochefort, Paul Deschanel and General Boulanger.

Brunetière also had his own salon, and even gave dinners, in the offices of the *Revue des deux mondes*. There a number of elections to the Academy were fomented, but he made the mistake of trying to rehabilitate the outcasts of the salon of Mme de Loynes.¹³⁹ However, such activities were mere diversions for the orator,—diversions which unfortunately shortened his day, already too brief for his multifarious activities. He could go for his morning canter in the Bois, and make up the time by longer vigils in his

¹³⁷ This phrase was popular in the early 'nineties, and Brunetière used it as the title of a lecture in 1896. Cf. DC, I.

¹³⁸ This tendency to over-simplify questions, and to lump them all under a general cause, is a characteristic of the man's reactionary period. It dates from the 'nineties, and is in sharp contrast to the keen analysis of the earlier work.

"Indeed, as soon as one considers them in perspective, it is not only political, social, and historical questions which are seen to be, at bottom, moral questions; the same is true of aesthetic questions." (RDM, Dec. 15, 1895, 4e période, tome CXXXII, p. 958.)

"Dilettantism, individualism, internationalism, I have come to see that all these are interrelated, that their consequences are not merely literary, and that their corrosive influence threatens those ideas which are dearest to us, and which have preserved France up to now." (Quoted from V. Giraud, MH, I, 61 n.)

¹³⁹ "All through his Academic life, Brunetière directed the votes of a part of the Right. Even the Left heeded him, for he was the director of the *Revue des deux mondes*. And then, he possessed an orator's temperament, and the will to convince. He was imperious, and he passed for omniscient. He insisted on electing Cardinal Mathieu and Hervieu, although the latter belonged to the Left. For twelve years he was the Chief Elector of the Academy; perhaps never in all time was one obeyed with such docility." (Jules Bertaut. in *Vingt-cinq ans de littérature française*, vol. II, p. 29.)

private office. He was prosecuting more vigorously than ever his practice of burning the candle at both ends, knowing that its light would soon be consumed.

Meanwhile he wrote polemical articles for the newspapers, delivered dozens of *discours de combat*, battled for the retention of the *programme classique* in the public schools, harassed the "Intellectuals" of the Dreyfus affair, fought inch by inch the losing struggle against separation of Church and State, worked at his trilogy of apologetics, engaged in public debates, edited his *Revue*, and at length resumed his position at the Ecole Normale because feeling ran so high against him there that it was being whispered he would not be allowed to return. Aside from his boundless energy and pugnacity, we should note the complexion of his thought at this time. It was increasingly humanitarian and democratic, as is indicated by a series of newspaper articles which constituted a kind of running debate with Georges Renard, a socialistic leader.¹⁴⁰ In this controversy, which created a great stir, Brunetière argued that the program of Socialism was not incompatible with the Christian idea, that the ideals of Socialism were borrowed from Christianity, that a good Catholic is in substantial agreement with the Socialist reformers, and that therefore Catholics and Socialists should unite to bring about the reforms which they desire in common.

Such a program, openly championed by the most prominent lay leader of Catholicism in the land, could not fail to arouse bitter antagonism, especially in France where the Church party is traditionally of the extreme Right. A good-sized fraction of the Catholics had always been suspicious of Brunetière because of his questionable ideas and extreme independence, but they had been restrained from an open break, for reasons already mentioned. But now the situation was very different. Leo XIII, whose personality and liberalism had first attracted the critic to the Church, had died the year before, and the ideas of Pius X were, by comparison, distinctly reactionary.

Back in 1895 a writer for *le Temps* had clearly foreseen what might happen, and his prophecy seems almost oracular

It is evident that M. Brunetière, having seen the Pope, a liberal and modern Pope, has somewhat modified his ideas. ... He believes that one should accept the cooperation of religion without sacrificing "one's independence of thought." He believes it doubtless because the present religious head is Leo XIII, but should the day come when we have a reactionary Pope, M. Brunetière will perhaps be obliged, in order to save "the independence of his thought," to shift his batteries. And on that occasion, in order to determine the new "evolution" of his ideas, to what Vatican will he make his pilgrimage?¹⁴¹

The accession of Pius X, in 1903, brought a change in the policies of the Vatican. Gone was the liberalism of Leo XIII, which had seemed to tolerate, if not to encourage, the venturesome apologetics of Brunetière. "Modernism" was vigorously combated, and the ultra-conservative faction of the Church felt encouraged to denounce its opponents.

¹⁴⁰ First appeared in *la Petite république*, March 27-April 10, 1904. Reprinted in QA.

¹⁴¹ Eugène Lautier, *le Temps*, Jan. 15, 1895.

Brunetière was soon aware of the changed atmosphere, but it must be admitted that he does not seem to have been very politic in his attitude towards the new regime. He continued, without apparent modification, his written and spoken works of apologetics. Early in 1904 his *Revue* carried an anonymous article¹⁴² which seems to question the canonicity of the election of Pius X. Two years later, the *Revue* published the first French translation of Fogazzaro's *Santo*,¹⁴³ which stirred all Europe with its "Modernistic" propaganda. Churchmen in France were sharply divided in their attitude towards *il Santo*, and feeling was running high when E.-M. de Vogüé, Brunetière's close friend and collaborator, defended it with a veritable panegyric in the daily press.¹⁴⁴ A few weeks later, Rome announced that *il Santo* had been placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*.

Brunetière was no longer *persona grata* to most leaders in the Church. He had always had opponents there, but now their number seemed to have multiplied, and included not a few who had formerly welcomed and exploited his services.¹⁴⁵ Dismayed by this turn of events, he paused in his career as a Catholic apologist, when his friends urged him to return to criticism. There was nothing else to be done. "Back to literature!"

¹⁴² "Les Derniers jours de Léon XIII et le conclave de 1903," RDM, March 15, 1904, 5e période, tome XX. The crux of the matter, as related by the anonymous writer, was the suppression of a certain kind of balloting, called the *accesso*, which should have been conducted, he says, immediately after the first ballot. The *accesso* would presumably have favored Cardinal Rampolla, who led in the first ballot. "... It is certain that the difficulties of the *accesso* were especially noticed by the adversaries of him whom it would surely have profited. The good faith of Cardinal Oreglia is above any suspicion, but it is to be regretted that a question of this importance was decided by a single person, contrarily to tradition, to the tenor of the apostolic constitutions, and to the very letter of the oath." (*Ibid.*, 276.)

¹⁴³ Appeared in RDM, January 15-March 15, 1906.

¹⁴⁴ *Le Figaro*, July 27, 1906.

¹⁴⁵ To avoid any possible misunderstanding, let it be repeated that Brunetière was quite sincere in his profession of faith as a Catholic, and remained so until the end. This study does not presume to judge his orthodoxy, but simply relates how he was received by various representatives of the Church. In general, he was received sympathetically, as is indicated by the following passage from a letter which a learned French cleric, the Abbot F. M. Cabrol, was gracious enough to write to me:

"We Catholics followed his progress with the greatest interest. His famous article *Après une visite* showed that he had become one of us, and from that moment we considered him as a Catholic. ... As for the sacraments, confession and communion, it was not known very well whether he was a practitioner. Some of us, especially the theologians, noticed that some of his propositions were not entirely orthodox; his philosophy was still somewhat Kantian, and certainly not Thomist. ... We are very fond of his works, and if we occasionally come upon such opinions, we pardon him, realizing that he was not a theologian. ..."

As we have seen, however, severity was manifested in some quarters. Even the Abbé Delmont, lenient in the matter of orthodoxy, cannot forgive him for his "Americanism," his Socialistic tendencies, and his advocacy of the *cultuelles*. This last transgression was excused by E. Lamy by virtue of Brunetière's "lack of theological preparation," and in the words of his priest: "by the lack, not of faith, but of religious life,—Brunetière was not a practitioner." (T. Delmont, *op. cit.*, 166.)

As for his apologetics, prelates like Mgr. Elie Blanc and unbelievers like Faguet were agreed that *Sur les chemins de la croyance* was faulty in its theology and dangerous in its arguments based on Comte and Darwin. Faguet compared him to "a knight with lowered visor, which is likely to impede vision." Cf., E. Faguet, *Revue latine*. Nov. 25, 1904, and Jan. 25, 1907; Mgr. Elie Blanc, *Pensée Contemporaine*, Dec. 26, 1904.

he assented bitterly.¹⁴⁶ But the age of his critical royalty had passed, for his ten-year abdication had left the field clear to younger talents, and the fickle public had come to consider him as a polemist, politician and Catholic propagandist, rather than literary critic.

Disappointments and humiliations crowded rapidly upon him. In the year 1904 he was removed from his position at the Ecole Normale, through the efforts of political enemies, and they ignored his application for a post at the Collège de France, just made vacant by the death of Deschanel. The political current was definitely anti-clerical, and Brunetière's influence had been too powerful not to bring about reprisals when the opportunity came. Considered not sufficiently Catholic to be a defender of the faith, he was yet too much so to retain his lay position.

His friends arranged for the use of a private hall to which the *Normaliens* might easily slip away to hear their master deliver his course on the *philosophes* and the eighteenth-century spirit. It was his plan, since the Church had frowned upon his collaboration, to pitch camp in the eighteenth century, and to do for that age what Sainte-Beuve in his *Port-Royal* had done for the seventeenth century. He had scarcely begun his series of lectures, however, when he was stricken with complete loss of his voice. This affliction, from which he never recovered, was the most grievous blow of all. His greatest joy had been the sense of action, of influence upon his auditors. Eighteen successful years upon the rostrum made other forms of utterance seem tame; his spirit burned as brilliantly as ever, but must perforce be translated by the pen.

He accepted the situation stoically; despite his latter-day denunciation of Stoicism as haughty individualism, he was more a Stoic than anything else. There is even a note of good-natured resignation in a letter to a friend:

My voice is still no better, but my character is improving, in one respect at least, and you can't imagine how easily I now put up with contradiction. Henceforth people can *say anything* to me, and I can talk back only to what is written.¹⁴⁷

He devoted himself to continuous study, despite his rapidly failing health, wrote articles for his *Revue*, worked on his monumental *Histoire de la littérature française classique*, and wrote a book on Balzac, solicited by an American publisher. This book, whose French edition passed almost unnoticed, has since caused readers no end of concern, because of its unreserved praise of an author whom Brunetière had previously criticised without mercy. The anomaly can be largely explained, it would seem, by the twenty-year interval which separates the two attitudes, and by the considerable evolution of the critic's ideas during that time. By his own admission, his early attitude had been far more "aristocratic" than it was in his last years. Analysis shows that the early article objects in general to Balzac's monotonous vulgarity, and in particular to his faults of

¹⁴⁶ V. Giraud, MH, I, 119.

¹⁴⁷ "Lettres de F. Brunetière et E.-M. de Vogüé," RDM, Aug. 15, 1924, 7e période tome XXII, pp. 790-791. Letter of July 18, 1905.

style. We have seen that Brunetière gradually evolved away from his idolatry of Flaubert's style, and in the 'nineties he frequently suggested that this element was less important than most critics thought. He adduced the examples of Molière and Saint-Simon, so often criticized for their style, and presently he bracketed Balzac's name with theirs.

This tendency was furthered by his increasing belief in the social function of literature. Obviously, the moral purport of *le Disciple*, let us say, is not invalidated by its style, which is surely a weakness. Brunetière stood up definitely as a defender of *le Disciple* and the attitude which it implies. He even went so far as to distinguish between "stylists" and "writers." The latter have true originality, he tells us, for they write with the serious purpose of giving a criticism of life; a "stylist" is only a dilettante whose sole interest is to "string words together," and "avoid a succession of two genitives."

It is clear that such a change of viewpoint must materially alter one's attitude towards Balzac. Brunetière concluded that the style of Balzac, Saint-Simon and Molière is good, and in fact the only style by which these "Naturalists" could attain the vividness and realism which they sought.¹⁴⁸

As for Balzac's vulgarity, Brunetière likewise changed his mind. As the critic became "less aristocratic," he found the personality of Balzac less distasteful. After the turn of the century, the Catholic-socialist-humanitarian, speaking to workingmen's clubs by night, attacking the evils of money and class by day, was pleased to find the same social problems in the pages of Balzac, and proclaimed him the founder of the modern novel, the discoverer of its true form and function.

The system of evolutionary criticism, elaborated after the early article was written, also contributed to the change. Like a highway, it leads in either direction. In his earlier criticism Brunetière tended to look only backward,—to use his method as an irrefutable proof of the validity of tradition and its mandates. In his later years he uses it to travel forward,—to evaluate the present and predict the future. Thus used, his theory tends to assume the guise of fatalism, or at least, of determinism. It does not say that "all that is, is well," but it does demonstrate that all that is, is inevitable, and that the immediate future is necessarily conditioned by the present. Such a doctrine held unescapable implications for the disillusioned, pragmatic Brunetière of the last years. It meant that, as with morals and Catholicism, he must cease to long for an unattainable ideal, that he must accept the situation realistically, and devote himself to practical efforts to improve conditions in the present and in the future. In the case of the novel it meant that, Balzac's influence having been predominant since his death, experience had shown that this was the form of the novel best suited to contemporary life. There is no appeal from the certain verdict of time, thought Brunetière; let us therefore accept the Balzac novel, and try to evolve from it the novel best suited to the twentieth century.

The fact that he totally exonerates Balzac from censure on moral grounds has also

¹⁴⁸ Brunetière's evolution with respect to Balzac has an exact counterpart in his changing attitude towards Flaubert. The reasons for both changes were the same.

aroused astonishment. Here again, it is a matter of understanding the man. Contrary to general opinion, he was not morally squeamish, and his strictures upon Zola were motivated by aesthetic, rather than moral grounds. We have seen how he endorsed the morality of Flaubert, Maupassant, and others. Over-sensitiveness in such matters is, he felt, more likely to be found in confirmed optimists and dreamy idealists. We know that Brunetière was scarcely the one or the other, and that as the years went by he became less so, if that were possible. Once when he was provoked he retorted angrily:

Realists or Naturalists, they are quite wrong, and they mislead the public, unintentionally no doubt, when they say ... that what I contest is their choice of subjects. No, the truth does not frighten me! ... It is a question of treatment rather than a question of morality. Much less fastidious than the Naturalists themselves, I am interested in scores of things which do not interest them ... but I am not therefore incapable of interest in those subjects which alone have interest for them. ...¹⁴⁹

He was perfectly sincere when he claimed to be a Naturalist, and his abiding pessimism accounts for this choice. He endorsed Molière, Saint-Simon, and Balzac for the same reason that he embraced Schopenhauer,—because he was convinced of their profound truth. He believed that Balzac did not exaggerate,—that human nature is just as immoral, as coarse, as vulgar as he represented it to be. This complete endorsement of the verity of the *Comédie humaine* implies a very deep pessimism, unaffected by his Christianity,—but we have already discussed his pessimism, and seen that it fitted perfectly well with his Christianity. We say sum up by saying that the critic endorsed Balzac's style for its vividness, and his morality for its stark realism.¹⁵⁰

The volume on Balzac (1905) was his last work of any magnitude, and is therefore of considerable significance in a study of the critic's last manner. The projected *History* did not get beyond the sixteenth century, and the monumental work on the eighteenth century was abandoned when the critic's loss of voice forced him to give up his lectures on the subject. The various restrictions imposed upon his activities benefited the *Revue*, which once more carried regular contributions by its editor. These articles were forthcoming up to the very day of his death, and two of them,—a short one on Molière and a long one on Montaigne,—are of a high order.¹⁵¹ It has well been observed that

¹⁴⁹ ELC, 234-235.

¹⁵⁰ He flatly denies the claim, made by Taine (*Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, 7e édition, Paris, Hachette, 1901, p. 11), that "the novelist's eye lights up as he portrays certain scenes." He admits that the charge is true with respect to the *Contes Drôlatiques*, but as for the novels, he considers that the author's attitude is sometimes "cynical," but very seldom "libertine." "This delicate distinction is everything," he concludes, and therefore "Balzac's immorality" is in truth "only a form of his coarseness or vulgarity." (F. Brunetière, *Honoré de Balzac*, translated by R. L. Sanderson, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1907, p. 217. Will be designated *infra* as *Balzac*.) He then quotes Sainte-Beuve as authority that Balzac's vulgarity did not prevent him from depicting adequately the higher classes and the great ladies of society. (This is one of the rare instances when Brunetière quotes Sainte-Beuve in order to agree with him.)

¹⁵¹ Both reprinted in EC, VIII.

Few men have ever crowded more intense activity into a life of fifty-seven years than Brunetière and there are few more striking examples of what may be achieved by a frail physique when sustained by an indomitable will. ... The study of Montaigne, which is one of the last things he did, is also one of the best, a remarkable achievement for a man in the final stages of a wasting disease.¹⁵²

Fortune reserved a final blow for Brunetière shortly before his death. The long struggle against Separation had been lost, amid the bitterest acrimony and recrimination, and the only concession of the new law was the permission to establish *associations cultuelles*. Catholic opinion was divided on what course to follow, for the conservatives held that it would be a humiliation to accept this concession. Brunetière felt that it would be foolish not to make the best of a bad situation. Accordingly he rallied the support of as many leaders as he could, and got them to agree upon a vigorous stand. He drew up a letter-manifesto to the French bishops, urging them to accept the law, bad as it was, and to found the *cultuelles*. After his signature followed the names of twenty-two Catholic writers and members of the two Chambers.

This letter, meant to be confidential, soon found its way into print. Its publication stirred up a bitter controversy, and for some months the Catholics of France were split into warring factions. In August, 1906, Pius X condemned the *cultuelles* in the encyclical *Gravissimo officii*. "Brunetière submitted as a Christian, but he suffered greatly to see himself disavowed, and to feel his authority diminishing."¹⁵³

"One of the cruellest disappointments which can befall a great agitator is for him to become the heretic of his own cause." It is well said, and these are Brunetière's own words referring to that fervent Catholic socialist and fideist, Lamennais. It is interesting to note that this article of 1893 is very sympathetic to Lamennais, indignantly clears him of the charges of insincerity, pride and ambition, finds his "stroke of genius" in his recognition of individualism as the great enemy of modern society, and proclaims finally "the continuity, the interior logic, and the unity of the life and the thought" of Lamennais, so that his so-called variations or contradictions were in reality only *evolution*.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² L. Babbitt, *op. cit.*, 298.

¹⁵³ *Dictionnaire pratique des connaissances religieuses*, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1925, fascicule IV, p. 994.

Shortly after the death of Brunetière, Pius X formally condemned the ideas for which the critic had recently been so bitterly attacked. The decree *Lamentabili* and the encyclical *Pascendi* denounced Modernism in detail, including the two forms of fideism of which Brunetière had been accused: the separation of reason from faith, and faith postulated on motives considered merely probable.

¹⁵⁴ NELC, 33-53 *passim*. Their community of thought seems the more striking when we note these statements: "Since there is more than one manner of understanding Christianity, it is enough that Lamennais' manner is not absolutely contrary to the letter, or even, I think, to the spirit of the Gospel. Even though he had found the criterium of certitude in authority, you cannot reproach him for shaking off the yoke of that authority. ..."

"If he was wrong,—since Rome condemned him,—who will dare to say that the error of Lamennais will not perhaps become the truth of to-morrow? ... 'The great fault of Lamennais was always to be ahead of his time.' That is the opinion of all those who have seen religion, in these last

Brunetière entered the Church to escape from individualism and then towards the end found himself treated as a heretic. The final impression, as in the case of Taine and so many other personalities of the last century, is that of a great spiritual solitude.¹⁵⁵

He died in December 1906, at the age of fifty-seven.¹⁵⁶ Up to the day of his death, he came regularly to the office of the *Revue* to perform his routine duties, and the December issue carried his monthly article. "He was an enthusiast who would have risked life, honor and fortune for a theory or an idea."¹⁵⁷ By his correspondence, we know that he voluntarily shortened his life in order to carry on the good fight. Though he fought for a cause that failed, all honor is due to his courage and unselfishness.

The very morning of the day when, with all the official pomp, the body of Marcelin Berthelot was borne in triumph to the Panthéon, a small group of friends gathered in a corner of the Montparnasse cemetery as the frail body of Ferdinand Brunetière was transferred from a temporary vault to its final resting place. What a symbol, and what irony!¹⁵⁸

Symbolic indeed, for with the simultaneous death of these two champions it seemed that something had disappeared, and this something was the *fin de siècle* spirit of the nineteenth century. Symbolic, and yet less ironic, perhaps, than pathetic, for the twenty-five years that have elapsed since then do not appear to have ratified the judgment of the politicians and the multitude at the national funeral of Berthelot. Science has, happily, grown in prestige as it has decreased in arrogance.

A contemporary noted that Aristide Briand, the official orator of the day, spoke less of Berthelot's discoveries and of his twelve hundred monographs, than of his polemic with Brunetière.¹⁵⁹ A similar remark could be made concerning the newspaper notices of Brunetière's death. It was perhaps inevitable that the stormy polemics of the last decade of his life should have obscured the memory of the man's real superiority,—his literary criticism.

years, attempt ... to *democratise* itself. ... But then the error of Lamennais was not so great? Was he not in the right? ... And if he was right, what is the sense of the accusations which are still showered upon his memory?" (*Ibid.*, 46-49.)

Four years later a leading Catholic writer, noting how some Churchmen rejected Brunetière's ideas, remarked: "Good judges ... got out the old weapons which had lain unused since the condemnation of Lamennais." (H. Bremond, *op. cit.*, I, 102.)

¹⁵⁵ L. Babbitt, *op. cit.*, 334.

¹⁵⁶ There were two rumors current in Paris at the time of his death: first, that he refused the last sacraments, and second, that the Church refused to administer them. These reports were unanimously denied by his friends, and by the priest who was called in (statement reproduced by T. Delmont, *op. cit.*, 35). It seems that he wished to die as a Catholic, but he delayed too long before sending for a priest.

¹⁵⁷ J. Bertaut, in *Vingt-cinq ans de littérature française*, vol. I, p. 244.

¹⁵⁸ V. Giraud, MAA, 254.

¹⁵⁹ L. Claretie, *Histoire de la littérature française*, Paris, Ollendorff, 1912, 2e édition, vol. V, p. 519.