

G3370
252.6 MOR

THE NEW RELIGION IN ITS ATTITUDE
TOWARDS THE OLD.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT

South Fields, Wandsworth,

WEDNESDAY, 19TH MOSES, 71 [19TH JANUARY, 1859],

ON THE

ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF AUGUSTE COMTE,

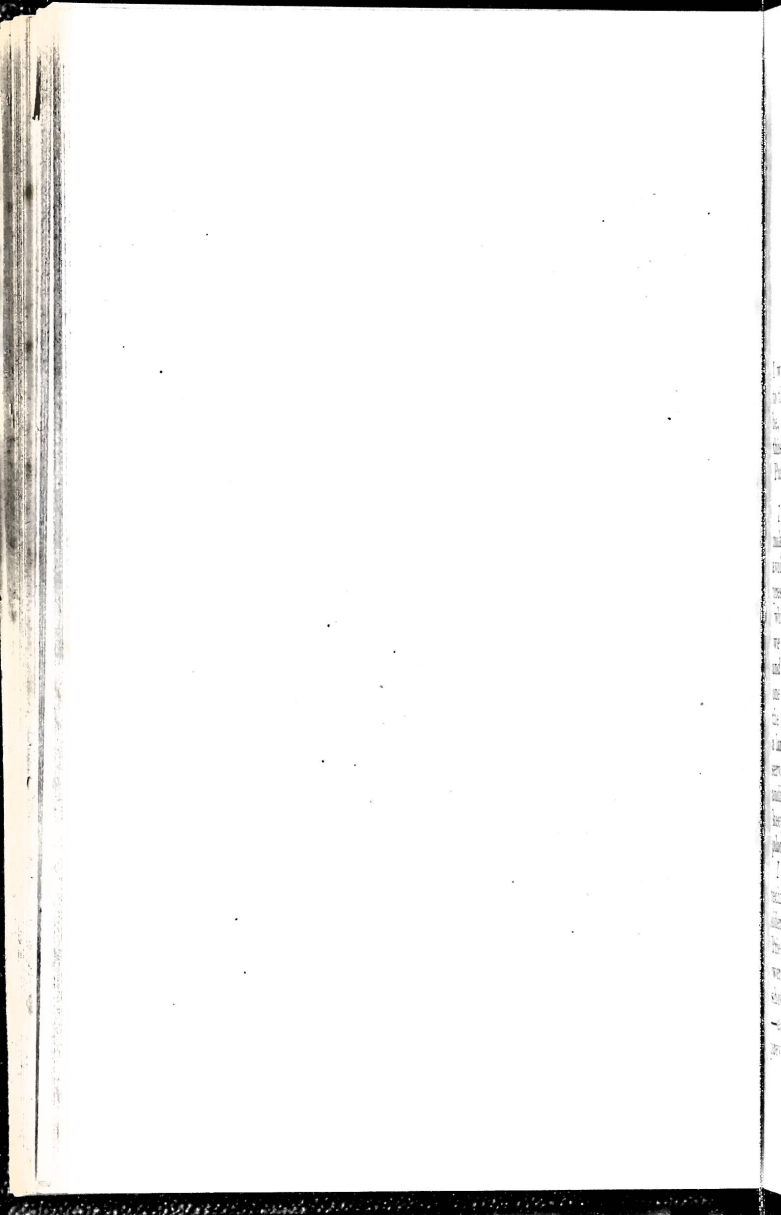
19TH JANUARY, 1798.

By RICHARD CONGREVE.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY W. POLLEY,
HIGH STREET, WANDSWORTH.

1859.

[*Price Threepence.*]



A SERMON.

I WOULD ask you for a few minutes to turn your thoughts to the other members of our church, wherever they may be, and more especially to the two centres, where, on this day, a similar act of worship will be performed—Paris, and Long Island, New York.

I read rather than speak to you, as our small number makes speaking difficult. It is scarcely possible to avoid a conversational style when there are but few present. Yet my wish is to avoid it to-day, for reasons which I need not here state. When writing, though we write what is to be heard directly by a few only, and though perhaps it is a good rule to write with some one person ever, as it were, before one, yet we can keep the consciousness that what we write may be heard by a larger circle outside, and whilst the one person preserves us from vagueness, the sense of the larger audience stimulates and controls. I would ask you to keep this in mind, if what I have written seem out of place in so small a congregation.

I use the word "congregation" purposely, as the technical term for a religious meeting, for such I consider this. I do not, I am aware, speak to you as a Priest of Humanity. My age is a bar to that. Nor were our church in possession of its full organization, should I speak as one of the second order of her ministers—as a vicar. My insufficient scientific training would prevent me. But under existing circumstances, I feel

that Mr. Edger is right in saying that I exercise in a sense the vicar's office. Where there are disciples or members, there, however limited their number, is a church. We have a faith, the outlines of a ritual, and sufficient members. It would be an undue shrinking from responsibility not in such a case to supply, within the limits of what is absolutely necessary, that which alone is wanting—a ministration. I look on this discourse as the first definite act of such a ministration; and though in the immediate present the case is not very likely to occur, yet should it occur, should there be a call for other acts of a minister, such as the administration of the indispensable sacraments, I mean Presentation and Marriage, I feel warranted in saying that I should have power to administer them with the full sanction of our central direction, duly sought and obtained. For the present, preaching is all we want, and that part of our institutions I hereby inaugurate. I am aware that such a step implies much; that it imposes obligations. I accept its consequences—I will meet those obligations to the full measure of my strength I have during the last few months anxiously tested our position and its needs. I have listened to the objections made to us, to the advice offered. I have examined also the position of our opponents, whether friendly or not. I have also looked at the general state of our country; the evils under which it labours, and their remedies; the state of opinion, and the measures which, with a fair attention to prudence, we may attempt. The general conclusion I have come to is, that the boldest course is the wisest, that the doctrine we advocate, the faith we hold, must be put forward as a religion, as something to believe in and live by—not as something which demands intellectual assent; that here in England we can be nothing if we do not claim,

and show the grounds for our claim, to be everything; that we must make it clear that we are not a philosophical school, but a church. On the practical measures which this conclusion involves I will not detain you now. My only aim has been to make it quite clear in what light I look on this present act of joint religion, as the inauguration, however imperfect, of the ministerial functions in the English branch of the Church of Humanity.

Two days have been set apart as festivals of the Religion of Humanity. Both have reference to its founder. The one commemorates the birth, the other the death, of our Master, Teacher, and Guide, Auguste Comte. On the latter, in September, in the present state of things, it is an object, as far as possible, to make the celebration of his memory as collective an act as possible. Whenever we have it in our power, we should, I think, consider it as a duty to join with our brothers, of whatever nation, assembled at Paris, to visit the tomb of our founder, and be present at such ceremony as our head shall think proper. On the day set apart in memory of his birth, the nature of the case, and our local separation, rather point to a national celebration at the outset, to merge, as our faith extends, in more local ones.

I have at times regretted the choice of this second day. I have wished that the first of the year had been taken. I have wished, that is, that there had been one directly personal day, whilst the second had been at once consecrated as the Festival of Humanity. Yet it is more in the spirit of our religion to accept cheerfully what has been done, and turn it to the best account. The ground of the decision was, I believe, that we were not ripe for the more abstract worship; that in our existing state we could join most truly and

with most reality in such worship as had direct reference to our founder. This language of course implies that the other had been better, and points us onward to that riper state. How, then, can we best make this day serve that purpose—let it keep, that is, its own character as a personal festival, at the same time that it assumes a preparatory character as leading on to the direct worship of Humanity, which I confidently trust will ere long be begun? A comparison of the two events which we commemorate will give us the answer. When on its anniversary we mourn our master's death, we naturally concentrate our attention on him, on his life and services. We worship Humanity in and through her noblest servant and organ, Auguste Comte. Our worship of her takes something of an indirect character; we insist more on the individual instrument and on the work done, less on the power which it served or on the cause in which it was done.

To-day, on the other hand, we may take a different view. Placing ourselves, as we naturally do, at a period prior to the work which Comte did, we ask ourselves what was the preparation made for it? And the answer makes us look back on the past which had preceded him—on the upward movement of our race, on the accumulation of materials, on the means placed at his disposal. We concentrate, then, our attention, not now on the work done, but on the cause in which it was done; not on the servant, but on the power he served; not on the product, but on the producer. We reverse the former process, and contemplate Comte in and through Humanity.

So looked at, both festivals equally bear on one of the most prominent characteristics of our religion—the worship of the dead. In the one, we worship them in and through the last and greatest of those eminent few

who, being dead, yet speak to the race of which they were the servants. In the other, we worship implicitly the aggregate of those whose collective services had prepared his way, who had hewn the materials which he was to employ in his construction. We worship that ever-increasing portion of humanity to which he is now joined, which comprehends all those who have lived worthily. Again, the second is the more collective, the first the more individual view.

Let us place ourselves in thought at the period of Comte's birth, quite at the end of the eighteenth century, and estimate, on as comprehensive a scale as we can, the result of the past history of our race and its then condition, at the time, that is, prior to the first promulgation of his conceptions. The prevalent feeling was one of uncertainty, distrust, almost despair. Movement there had been, and still was; and that the movement in the past had been, in the ordinary sense, a progress, was scarcely denied. Whether it was so in the present, was a matter of question. Looking back, men saw that one organization after another had been tried, and attentive study might show that each successive one had been larger than the last. All, however, including the last and widest, that of Catholicism, had failed; or, at least we may say, it had been broken up for a time, so that even its most devoted admirers only ventured to put its restoration as a possible alternative. The crash of the old society still ringing in their ears, men were glad to accept any temporary shelter which might avert anarchy; but such shelter as they found could satisfy no competent judge. They questioned history, and whatever the value of the answers they elicited, they did not succeed in so interpreting her teaching as to draw any guiding principle from it. They saw that not merely temporal organizations, king-

doms and empires, had broken up, but that spiritual ones also had ceased to command men's faith. They were looked on as fancies which the world had outgrown; disencumbered from which we might proceed onwards without hesitation. In a word, the intellect of man had acquiesced in denial, in negation. Yet it was clear to the blindest, for it was subsequent to the great crisis of 1793 and 1794, that the heart of man had not, and could not, acquiesce in negation and denial; that it was at issue with the conclusions of the intellect; or that, if it accepted them, the result was evil. For the nature of man was there still with its eternal combination of two elements, eternal under every difference of name, its selfishness and its unselfishness. The first was universally recognised, by some even made to constitute the whole nature; the second was only recognised as an independent element by a few; yet its existence was felt by the vast majority, felt if not explicitly acknowledged. Science and feeling were at variance. The questions put by the heart were disallowed by the intellect, whilst the conclusions of the intellect were rejected by the heart. Under such conditions action was difficult.

Had, then, the past been a failure? Had the efforts of the human race been wasted? had its movements been governed by no law, and so did they afford no light for the future? Was all to begin again, and without any definite aim was society to go through a cycle of new changes to end in a new crash, instinctively suiting itself to its wants, and turning itself, like the sick man, only to get a change of position, under the impulse of mere weariness? Was history but a record of action, with an interest of its own but with no teaching, of the same character as a work of fiction, serving to occupy the learned, or to amuse those who had a taste for it?

But ten years before Comte's birth, a different feeling had been common. The European world had been full of hope on the eve of a great change which had held out the brightest prospects—a new era of justice, and peace, and universal brotherhood. But the change had come; the event had disappointed all, and a general lassitude was the consequence. A large destruction had taken place, but no new construction had followed; and men were building again their temporary shelter with the materials which had failed them so often. The consciousness of this was discouraging.

In all times, since the earliest dawn of history, men who had not been absorbed in the immediate present had looked inquiringly on the spectacle of man's nature and human society, and had sought to give a reason to themselves of what they saw. As the race grew older, and its experience consequently increased, the judgments of such inquirers had become more comprehensive. An immutable destiny had presided over human action as over the order of nature, nay, even over the gods whom men and nature equally obeyed. An overruling Providence, in the person of an all-wise and all-powerful God, the Maker and Preserver of all things, had taken the place of that earlier belief, the creation at once of the philosophic intellect, as well as of the popular instinct. Subordinate to this general conception, there had been a dim sense that man's actions and social development depended on fixed laws, traceable by observation, and capable of giving a certain measure of guidance. A combination of these two ideas had led men to frame schemes on which they could arrange the events of history, and the sequence of human revolutions. Boldly rejecting the first part of the combination, others had gone so far as to look for the solution of all such questions simply in man's

circumstances, and nature, and history. Strong in the results of a limited and one-sided observation, they had trusted to their instinct, and proclaimed that progress was the law which humanity obeyed—progress ever onwards in a direct line, with an indefinite horizon before them of perfectibility, encouraging the most magnificent, must we not also add, the most visionary hopes—hopes, however, valuable even in their wildness, as testifying to the instinct which had induced their formation. That instinct, we may truly say, had never been wanting; we may trace it in the earliest periods of our race, in the creations of the poet, in the conceptions of the philosopher, in the anticipations of the prophet. The old language is true. The earnest expectation of the creature waited for the manifestation; the whole creation groaned and travailed in pain until now.

Such was the state of things, such the materials prepared, at the time when Comte's powers were sufficiently matured to form a judgment on them, and on the use to which they might be put; such I may add was the instinct of man, such the great want to be satisfied. The old interpretations of nature, and of human government, and social organization had failed. Was a new interpretation possible? Such was the problem to be solved.

We say with confidence, and with gratitude; It has been solved. The interpretation has been given. Reading afresh the writing which had lain before the gaze of statesmen and philosophers, by the help of aids which they had not had, Auguste Comte was enabled to give an interpretation which they had missed from the want of these aids. He saw that in one department there had been unbroken progress, whilst in all others there had been interchange of growth and decay.

He saw that in regard to that outer world, which is the theatre of man's actions, a certain method had been all-powerful to reduce it more and more within the range of man's knowledge and consequent power of dealing with it for his own purposes. That method had been the recognition of invariable laws, which we could learn by observation, and turn to useful account by obedience. Two branches only, of all that were accessible to man, remained exempt from the application of this method—the social and the moral. Once show that they could be brought within its range, and the philosophical problem was solved. The intellect was enabled to move evenly over all the field of human knowledge, without any abrupt separation of its parts. This Comte is acknowledged by competent judges to have shown.

Social and moral laws being demonstrated, it remained to apply them to practice. The philosophical study of human nature must find its expression, its application in practical politics. So alone could the truth and utility of its results be tested. But here his work undergoes a change. Its character is raised, might I say transfigured. The powerful philosophical elaboration becomes a creation. The treatise on the principles of government and morals passes into the constitution of a living church. The teacher and philosopher stands before us as the apostle and the priest.

He had long worked alone, and under the most adverse outward circumstances. His intellect had been severely tasked, his affections repressed, his character exposed to all hardening influences, his daily life embittered by constant domestic annoyances. He had borne up against all during seventeen years, in the faith that the truths he had to discover and reveal would be of real social value. He had laboured to fix on a firm basis the great discovery of his earlier life, the law of

social development, the law of the three states of all our conceptions, holding good equally for the race and for the individual. With this object he had gone through the whole range of abstract thought, whether as applied to the outer world or to man. In this work he had found his refuge, in this work and in the spirit of love in which he had undertaken and continued it. Hence his great endurance, which had been tried at times even too severely. His life had been a constant act of devotion to the power he served. Outwardly impassive, the fire had burned more strongly within, and the affection which could find no worthy individual object had been concentrated on a collective one. As he studied the movement of the human race in its history, we cannot doubt that half unconsciously his sympathy had grown more lively, his conviction of a brighter future more intense. This was but the natural result of such work as his. Every artist loves his work, and as Comte worked out into fuller light, the conceptions of the past stages of man's existence, those conceptions became, though under a strictly scientific garb, what his poem is to the poet. And all his conceptions and studies tended one way, to raise him out of himself, and to make him lose himself in his race. In silence, then, I conceive a great work had been going on; he had been preparing for a new existence. At the end of his philosophical elaboration, he rested before entering on the subsequent construction for which that had been but the basis. It was in this interval of rest that he became acquainted with Madame de Vaux. His intercourse with her was short, one year saw its beginning and end. His intercourse, I mean, in the ordinary sense of the word. In the truest sense it ended only with his death, eleven years later. But that one year was enough. The inner deep was broken up; the great

springs of affection were opened; the long pent-up nature revealed itself, and as on the high mountain tract, what was but yesterday snow, was to-day the grass and the flower. His endurance and faith had met a reward. For him, too, there was a possibility of individual sympathy and affection, and the love of the race might be quickened by the genuine human love of a noble woman. I have heard it said, that for the truest tenderness you require great strength, and the language is certainly so far correct, that where a strong nature does not harden, but suffers itself to develop its tenderness, there this latter quality will master the man in a way which poorer natures find it hard to conceive. Be this as it may, it is clear that his love for Madame de Vaux revealed him to himself, placed his being and his work consequently in a new light before him, at the same time that it gratified the want of personal sympathy under which he had nearly sunk.

In the vivid sense of blessedness which this change brought with it, in the enjoyment of this individual love, I again say it with the full consciousness of what I am saying, he was transfigured. His true nature was shown forth, the warmth of his sympathies became evident, his character was softened, yet lost none of its force; his genius became clearer under the impulse of his heart. He trusted himself more fully, and gave himself a more complete expression. In the highest sense of the term, as well as in its more limited and more ordinary sense, he became purified. He had himself drunk at the true spring of human happiness, which is love, and he had been prepared for its effects by his self-sacrifice. He was enabled to see that for others, too, for all men, there was no other source to which they could go but to this, where the laws of happiness and duty are fused into one.

He stood revealed to himself, and his work also stood in a new light before him. The unity of the human race, over whose progress he had pondered, had long been a conviction with him. With the conception, too, of Humanity, as a higher organism he had familiarized himself, and by the light of that conception had interpreted its past and meditated on its future. Neither in this respect any more than with regard to his own moral nature was there any abrupt change. The philosophical character had been predominant; it gave way to the human. The conviction became faith; the organism in which he had believed claimed and received his veneration and his love, in other words, his worship. So I read his progress.

We who share that faith, that veneration, and that love; we who would worship as he worshipped; we who would preach by our lives, and, where possible, by our spoken or written words, that great Being whose existence is now revealed; that Being of whom all the earlier divinities which man has created as the guardians of his childhood and early youth are but anticipations, we can appreciate the greatness of the change which his labour has effected. We can see, and each in his several measure can proclaim to others, that what was but a dim instinct, has become a truth, in the power of which we can meet all difficulties; that where there was inquiry, now there is knowledge; where there was anxious searching, now there is possession; that uncertainty has given way to confidence, despondency to courage. We see families forming into tribes, and tribes into cities or states, and states into still larger unions. And distinct from all such unions we see, besides, different races co-existent, distrustful, or hostile. We feel that the ascending series is not complete; that as the family in the earliest state is at war

with other families, the tribe at war with other tribes, so the nations and races are at variance with each other; and that as the remedy in each previous case has been the fusion of the smaller into the larger organism, so it must be still the same if the process is to be completed, and that no more than the single family or the isolated tribe can the greatest nation or the most powerful race stand wholesomely alone. All must bend, all must acknowledge a common superior, a higher organism, detached from which they lose themselves and their true nature, become selfish and degraded. Still higher organisms there may be; we know not. If there be, we know that we cannot neglect the one we know, nor refuse to avail ourselves of the aid which it can give us when once acknowledged and accepted.

We accept it then, and believe in it. We see the benefits Humanity has reaped for us by her toilsome and suffering past; we feel that we are her children, that we owe her all; and seeing and feeling this, we love, adore, and serve. For we see in her no mere idea of the intellect, but a living organism, of which we all are parts, and from which we cannot conceive ourselves cut off, the highest organism within the range of our knowledge. The family has ever been allowed to be real; the state has ever been allowed to be real; St. Paul felt, and since him, in all ages, Christians have felt that the Church is real. We claim no less for Humanity; we feel no less that Humanity is real, requiring the same love, the same service, the same devotion. We see the General Assembly and Church of the first-born, the faithful who in all ages have served, not themselves, but their race. We would be joined to them ourselves. We see with Isaiah, in the visions of the future, all nations coming to join us and them. The great apostle saw the Christian Church in

its glory, without spot or wrinkle. We throw open wider than he could the portals of the Church to which we belong—the Church of Humanity. The world to him lay in wickedness, and was given over to the service of devils. We can trace the good underlying the evil—can sympathize with our fellow-men in all their phases of existence; and where he saw devils, we can see creations of as much validity as his own God; and, as I have said already, in his and their objects of worship we find anticipations of our own. True, St. Paul spoke of there being neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ being all and in all. And the language testifies to the largeness of his love, and the grandeur of his intellectual conception. But for the union to which he aspired a condition is implied which could not be fulfilled for the time which preceded him, and has not been fulfilled since his time; which, we may safely say, never will be fulfilled. Christendom is not Christian, nor becoming Christian. How should it convey to others that which it does not believe in and live by itself? How should it convert Heathendom? We are limited by no such condition. We cannot restrict our admission. The very idea of Humanity forbids any such exclusion. In one way or other she admits all human beings within her pale. Nay she goes further, and recognises the services of the animal races that promote her welfare. Nor is this the limit of her power. She may borrow Shelley's words, and say—

I am the eye with which the universe
Beholds itself and knows itself divine;
All harmony of instrument or verse,
All phrophecy, all medicine are mine,
All light of art or nature;—to my song
Victory and praise in their own right belong.

In the exercise of her power she proceeds to complete herself by two great creations.

As we contemplate man's action and existence, we are led to think of the sphere in which they take place, and of the invariable laws under which they are developed. We rest not, then, in any narrow or exclusive spirit in Humanity, but we pass to the earth, our common mother, as the general language of man—the correct index to the universal feeling—has ever delighted to call her; and from the earth we rise to the system of which she is a part. We look back on the distant ages when the Earth was preparing herself for the habitation of man, and with gratitude and love we acknowledge her past and present services. With the same feelings, though with less intensity, we regard the heavenly bodies, which in a greater or less degree influence this abode of man—the Sun, the Moon, and the Earth's fellow-planets; the World, in short, in the real sense in which we use the term. The stars in their brightness, the hosts of heaven are a sight of beauty, but beyond that (I speak broadly, not unaware that the statement requires a certain limitation scientifically), they offer us nothing. And in the spirit of self-discipline we accept their beauty gratefully, but we seek not to penetrate further, for we recognise the limits of our powers, and we can afford no waste of them.

The invariable laws under which Humanity is placed have received various names at different periods. Destiny, Fate, Necessity, the Heaven, Providence, all are so many names of one and the same conception: the laws which man feels himself under, and that without the power of escaping from them. We claim no exemption from the common lot. We only wish to draw out into consciousness the instinctive acceptance

of the race, and to modify the spirit in which we regard them. We accept; so have all men. We obey; so have all men. We venerate; so have some in past ages or in other countries. We add but one other term—we love. We would perfect our submission, and so reap the full benefits of submission in the improvement of our hearts and tempers. We take in conception the sum of the conditions of existence, and we give them an ideal being and a definite home in Space, the second great creation which completes the central one of Humanity. In the bosom of Space we place the World; and we conceive of the World and this our mother Earth as gladly welcomed to that bosom with the simplest and purest love, and we give our love in return.

Thou art folded, thou art lying
In the light which is undying.

Thus we complete the Trinity of our religion, Humanity, the World, and Space. So completed, we recognise its power to give unity and definiteness to our thoughts, purity and warmth to our affections, scope and vigour to our activity. We recognise its power to regulate our whole being; to give us that which it has so long been the aim of all religions to give—internal union. We recognise its power to raise us above ourselves, and by intensifying the action of our unselfish instincts, to bear down into their due subordination our selfish ones. We see in it yet unworked treasures. We count not ourselves to have apprehended, but we press forward to the prize of our high calling. But even now, whilst its full capabilities are unknown to us, before we have apprehended, we find enough in it to guide and strengthen us. It harmonizes us within ourselves by the strong force of love,

and it binds us to our fellow-men by the same power. It awakens and quickens our sympathy with the past, uniting us with the generations that are gone by firmer ties than have ever been imagined hitherto. It teaches us to live in the interest and for the good of the generations that are to follow in the long succession of years. It teaches us that for our action in our own generation we must live in dutiful submission to the lessons of the past, to the voice of the dead, and at the same time we must evoke the future by the power of imagination, and endeavour so to shape our action that it may conduce to the advantage of that future.

Such are the general principles, by the light of which the institutions of our nascent church and social organization have been sketched by its Founder. A detailed notice of these institutions I avoid at present. Enough if in brief I state some of their leading points. On the basis of the Family, the primary and indestructible element of all human society, we raise the Country or the State, and the Church, as the three social forms which can never be dispensed with, which admit neither of diminution nor of increase when the human organism is rightly constituted. Marriage indissoluble even by death; the parental and filial relation strengthened by an education which shall not neglect the intellect, but which shall never forget its essential subordination as the minister of the affections and the guide of action; which shall therefore recognise the mother's influence as predominant during childhood, and shall direct all its efforts to preserve it and strengthen it during youth and early manhood,—Women freed from all hard labour; freed from the necessity of leaving their homes, and maintained by the labour of man; honoured as the highest influence in domestic and public life, as the purest representatives of humanity;—a Priesthood,

which as every other great priesthood has been, shall be the depository of all the intellectual accumulations of the race, and which shall, with perfect gratuitousness, freely give out from that store to all equally, without distinction of sex or of rank; a priesthood which shall bring to the performance of its high duties devotion and zeal such as we honour in the better members of other priesthoods, whilst it shall give guarantees which have never been as a whole exacted from them; which shall renounce all temporal power and all property, all tendency to isolation of interests and distinctness of position as given by celibacy, whilst it brings a long novitiate and ripe age to insure so far as may be its intellectual and moral competence; a priesthood which, as the fountain of education, and the dispenser of knowledge—(a knowledge, be it remembered, accessible to all, and consequently guarded against any undue concentration or abuse,)—shall reject all claims to mysterious power, and stand on the right and noble performance of its educational functions, but which, on that firm basis shall speak to all classes and on all questions with freedom and sincerity, thus exercising a great consultative influence over those whom it has educated; a priesthood, finally, to which all orders and degrees of man shall look for their sanction and consecration whilst living, for the judgment on their life after death, that consecration to be given, that judgment to be pronounced, by virtue of a common faith and common principles of action.—Capital and labour both honoured, both recognised as essential; the capitalist looked on as wielding the most indispensable of material functions in the accumulation and transmission of wealth; as the comptroller and dispenser of the treasures which the industry of man has brought into existence by its long efforts, but never suffered to

forget that he is the steward of society, the depository of a trust to be used for no selfish ends; the workman released from his now brutalizing toil—released to an extent which as yet it would be thought wild to dream of—taught to estimate aright and acquiesce in his position; taught at the same time to modify it so far as is compatible with such acquiescence; accepting labour not as a curse but as a blessing; only asking that the treasures of affection and of art and of thought shall be opened to him largely and freely, so that he, too, may feel and enjoy his human nature; finding therefore in the rich enjoyment of the family life, in the powers conferred on him by education, in the consciousness of his freedom from their responsibilities a compensation for the absence of power and wealth; yet feeling at the same time that by the sympathy of the priesthood and that of his fellow-workmen there is placed in his hands a strong power to moderate the action of the other social forces from which he at present suffers so grievously.—Such are the points to which my present limits confine me, but they may be enough to give in a measure the conception of society such as we view it from the vantage ground of Humanity. I would add that such a form of society looks to no law or despotic agencies to establish it or to maintain it. It must rest on a purely spiritual basis, on the free convictions of those who form it, such convictions to result from a common education. On no point are the statements of our founder clearer; on no point are they so little understood. The degree to which they are misunderstood or misrepresented is scarcely conceivable by any one who has honestly read his works.

I have stated the problem which Comte found unsolved. I have stated the personal conditions under which he solved it. I have stated very briefly the

solution he has given. I turn to the consideration of ourselves who accept that solution and its fullest consequences, who are to begin to reap where he has sown.

It is true we are but a small body; it is true we are but pioneers of the future; that we can never hope to see the organization of that future otherwise, speaking generally, than as he saw it, as an ideal. Yet by virtue of his labours and of his creations we have entered into our inheritance. We are of age—we claim the full possession of that which is ours. I feel that we must work mainly for the future, but I do not therefore feel that we need renounce any part of that which the past has bequeathed to us. We have the consciousness of being the children and the servants of Humanity. We would use in her service all the materials with which she endows us. We would enjoy as her children all the property she has stored up for us. Her existence is one and continuous—a constant struggle to raise herself and increase her possessions; to adapt herself to her home and her home to herself; and whilst we would add in our turn, we feel that we may freely enjoy the results already attained. Our inheritance consists of the great actions that have been done, the great words that have been spoken, the great creations of art in all its forms. Religion, philosophy, art, science, industry, all are put under contribution. So, too, are the various social organizations which men have formed, and in which they have embodied their conceptions of order, of law, and government. We are made free of Humanity, and we pass upwards or downwards in her course by the power of sympathy. Nor does our freedom stand us in less stead with reference to the problems of the present day, and the co-existent branches of the great human family. Our

sympathy is in this case limited only by the imperfection of our knowledge. It will increase as our knowledge increases. We are sure that the faith by which we live is sufficient for all our requirements. It has been felt that Catholicism, and still more Protestantism, stand in a difficult relation to the arts and civilizations that preceded them, as also to those which exist at the same time with them, though distinct from them. The difficulty has been variously met, but never quite got rid of. We feel no such difficulty. In the unity of Humanity we set ourselves clear of it. All previous, all co-existent civilizations are different in form only. We accept all as useful and true in relation to the wants of those who lived or who live under them. We seek to understand and sympathize, not to regret or condemn. We can admit no break. Nay more, we seek to trace out the ideas and feelings which men have clothed so variously, that we may incorporate them so far as we can, for our faith is not new in its elements, but new in its combination of those elements. With the simple worshipper of the Fetich period, we endow the world without us with will and feeling; we do not treat all the beautiful forms around us as inert matter, we only refuse them intelligence. But whereas he rested in that belief as sufficient, and assumed that it was an adequate account of the external world, we consciously adopt it, and after the labour of the scientific intellect is complete we turn from it and borrow the eye of the poet. With the later worshipper of the gods of Polytheism we can also sympathize, and recognise the services of his graceful faith, as the poets of our western civilization have ever done. The severe conception of the Jewish legislator or the Arabian prophet, their pure monotheism finds no stinted admiration from us, any more than the modification of

the former aimed at by early Christianity, or the half polytheistic system of Catholicism. The framework of polity which all the religious lawgivers have constructed on their religion is made to conduce to our teaching.

And we so treat all the past, so seek to combine it, not as a mere intellectual question,—for the pleasure of contemplation,—glorying in “the wide thought and the vast hope,” as a species of personal distinction and acquisition. Rather would we share the simplest and the lowest of previous faiths than thus dwell alone in our palace of art, however richly adorned with all forms of beauty, replete with all high associations. No, we seek to sympathize with all, to understand all, to embrace all, in order that we may serve more usefully. The real and the useful, such are the tests to which we bring alike philosophical conceptions and poetic visions,—such is the basis on which we build. Men amongst our fellow-men, we raise our palace towers on the broad foundations of our common humanity.

Resting on this cordial sympathy with the past, on this dutiful submission to the influence of the dead, we feel no difficulty when we try to penetrate and call up before us the future. Experience teaches us no distrust. On the contrary, it inspires us with full confidence. We are sure that what has been an unbroken progress shall continue to be so, and with this conviction borne in upon us, on the most rational grounds, we cast aside all hesitation. The imagination of the poet, the vision of the prophet, we use them both. And within the limits of man’s condition soberly estimated, there is no good of which we do not see the certain fruition. We see wars cease and jarring interests reconciled by virtue of the convergent tendency which we verify in the past history of our race, and not by any fanciful anticipation. We see the human race, conscious of its destination,

advancing towards a more complete mastery over itself, its energies, and its circumstances. We see the numerous evils to which we are liable met with more skill where skill is available, with greater resignation where resignation is necessary. We see many of those evils disappear as the natural result of the greater unity of the whole man, which the Religion of Humanity ensures. The forms of European disease are unknown, many of them, to the simple Fetichists of Africa. It seems no mere dream to suppose that the return of mental harmony to the distracted populations, whether of Europe, Asia, or America, may have a like result. The past civilizations have seen the arts cultivated, and productive of fruits which are the heirloom of the race. The civilization of the future, we doubt it not, shall see the same effect on a grander scale, in proportion as the basis on which it rests shall be firmer, and men's sense of possession stronger. True, that for the present the new faith exists but in outline, and appears but meagre in this point of view, when put side by side with its predecessors, Polytheism or Catholicism. This is its necessary condition at its birth. But whilst it adopts, nay, claims as its own the productions of its rivals, it will in due time match them and complete them. Till it does so we enjoy what others enjoy with a better title than theirs, and a more inspiring hope.

For the present in which our lot is cast, its consideration is less cheering. We need the strength derived from the other two, and the steadiness of conviction which our view of them is calculated to give. We need, I hesitate not to say it, to live as little as we can in the present, as much as we can in the past and future. Still we must live and act, and whilst I allow the gloomy character of the present, I feel that our faith can meet it and master it. The more we rise above it, the clearer

will be our view of its wants and of our own conduct. We know that, wander and revolt as it may, no generation or succession of generations can withdraw itself from the operation of the fixed laws of our nature. It may not be for us to see how the existing condition of things is leading on to the future of which we are so confident; yet we may be sure that it is so leading, and by an attentive study we shall discern the how. We must not be led astray by the noise and hurry around us, but watch what has preceded us, and be sure that in silence influences are at work which will set matters right. We are freed from all nervous excitement and impatience by this conviction; at the same time I can trace in it no tendency to enfeeble our action. Our great object must be to get a clear conception of the nature and limits of our intervention if it is to be useful, so as to avoid waste of efforts. There is scarcely any feature of the present time in England which is more discouraging than the waste we see going on owing to the want of such a conception and the misunderstanding of the social problems. We can avoid this, and yet find abundant scope for our activity. For whilst we acknowledge the evils and imperfections that exist, and would sound to their very depths the social wants, we avail ourselves to the full also of all remedies that offer, nay, even largely of palliatives; and we feel the real interest which society, however disorganized, can never lose. This follows, of course, from our view of life. This earth is to us our home, its actual inhabitants those whom we are to help, and by whom we are to be helped more immediately. We feel that, if accepted, our faith can largely minister to the good of mankind. We acquiesce in no desparing abandonment of our position. We acquiesce not in the general *saue qui peut* cry which I hear loudly preached from

the Christian pulpits. We would stand ourselves and gather others round us, turning the rout into resistance, and resistance into victory. We call on others to do the same, or to confess that they cannot, and as confessing that, to stand aside whilst we act, guide, and govern.

It will, I hope, be seen from this language, that when I say we ought to live mainly in the past and in the future, I speak in no spirit of quietism, or from any wish to shirk the questions and difficulties and duties of the present. If we are to clear ourselves of the present, it is in order that we may serve it better, and gain strength for that service. In another form the language would be accepted by all religious minds. The acts of devotion, prayer, meditation, the Christian sacrament of the Mass or the Lord's Supper, what are they but communion with the invisible—the not present? and what is one great object of them but to enable those who are most careful in performing them to act the better on the visible—the present? We differ not in principle if we modify and enlarge the form. We, too, would live in faith or communion with that which is not seen, whether that communion take the shape of commemoration of benefits received, or of imagination of the future blessings to be conferred by Humanity. As a necessary link in the great chain of these blessings we would exert ourselves with all vigour.

Thus imperfectly I have touched on the main points of our position considered in relation to our direct action. But we can none of us forget that we are in the midst of opponents, and that our bearing towards them is of the greatest practical importance. We cannot hope to escape the fate of all who have broken off from received opinions and the traditional faith of

their time or country. In vain we urge that ours is a continuation, a development of the past. It is antagonistic to the present; that is undeniable and enough. Nor however much we may wish to strip our faith of any aggressive character, can we prevent its being in competition with existing forms of religious belief. Opposition then we must meet, and considerable hostility; and though I cannot wish even not to have the former, nor hope to conciliate the latter, still I would do what lies in me to make our own attitude as inoffensive as possible, and to attract the sympathy of the better amongst our opponents.

In their ranks, and with the same general professions, are to be met men as widely apart in feeling as is conceivable. With some few I know the sympathy I offer will not be rejected, that which I court not be denied me. I feel also that there are many on whose strongest opposition I count who will not lose all kindly feeling. With such I would wish the contest to be of a very simple character. I would say to them—We differ as to means, but in a large degree our end is the same; we would serve our fellow-men, so would you. Where there is misery, or ignorance, or vice, there we both would try our remedies. We, the servants of Humanity, accept and honour your efforts as the servants of Christ; the more truly you serve him, the more thoroughly you mould yourselves into his image, the more keen will be our sympathy and admiration. I speak as one who was once a Protestant to those who are still Protestants. We have in no way lost our sympathy with the church of our fathers, with the faith taught us in infancy, which guided us in youth and early manhood. Our memory is stored with all holy and gentle associations; we can yet appreciate the attractions of Protestantism, we yet dwell with

pleasure on its greater names, on the devotion which it has inspired, and still inspires, on the great influence for good which it can yet exercise. We can look on you as unconscious servants of Humanity. We are glad that you should look on us, as I know some have done, as unconscious servants of Christ.

Again, if you are, either by birth or by change, members of the Catholic Church, our language need not essentially alter, whilst in one respect our sympathy is quickened. For of all the steps by which the race has advanced, on none do we linger with more respectful and enthusiastic admiration than on mediæval Catholicism, on the church of the Gregorys, the Innocents, the Bernards. None of the transitional forms of spiritual organization has conferred greater services on Humanity. We study the traditions of your Papacy, and we seek to adopt them into our system. To Catholicism we owe the distinction between the spiritual and temporal power, the great cardinal principle of all right social organization. To Catholicism, in combination with Feudalism, we owe the worship of the Virgin, in which creation we find a more perfect anticipation of our Divine Humanity than in the God-Man of early and northern Christianity. Our debt is deep to your Church, and we freely admit it.

Or take another and not uncommon case, and suppose that the opponents, such as I am dealing with, have wandered from all the paths which have hitherto been accepted, but feel it impossible to acquiesce in the new one we offer. Again we have no difficulty. We have many of us been in the same condition—we have passed through a stage of negation, and can sympathize with those who remain in it. Your efforts to attain something more satisfactory are such as ours were; your labour to do good in your generation in spite of your

negative state is inspired by the same spirit which we wished to direct our own. To all such, whether Protestant or Catholic, or neither, we can say indifferently—Let the only question be which shall work most efficiently in the cause which he considers the right one. You may not accept our aid, we will give it unaccepted and unsought. As your dangers thicken round you, you may adopt a different spirit, and welcome those whom you now reject. Come when it may, we shall be ready to meet such a change. Even now we would organize a league between all who feel the evils of our time, its social anarchy, its religious negation. If you say you cannot join us, that to you our remedy is a worse evil than the actual state, we shall none the less feel that there is such a league, though its existence be unrecognised by you; and we shall be glad when you are ready on your side to recognise it. It were well if that time were come.

With the large mass of our opponents those whom I have been addressing have almost as little in common as they have with us. Nominally they have the same cause, but their spirit is widely different. They profess the same belief, but with the one it is the guiding principle of their lives, on the other it has no visible effects. Here will be the worst hostility. We cannot hope to disarm it. Suspicion, reproach, cold friendship, and zealous enmity—such was the treatment Arnold taught us to expect whilst Christian, and his teaching was the legitimate result of his experience. We can hardly drink a more bitter cup than he drank. We may count even more surely on the same in our new faith. We can only submit in patience, calling on our adversaries to make it clear by their conduct that they really value the faith which they profess. We can urge on them to act up to it, or not to attack us if they do not. But at the best we must bear their en-

mity as we may; the less easily as we feel that those who show it have no warrant either intellectual or moral.

Generally with regard to all opponents of whatever creed and whatever conduct, our attitude must be respectful and patient. And widening our view so as to take in all who are not with us, we must seek to act on them in as sympathetic a spirit as possible. *Inflexible in principle, conciliating in action*—such is our rule, as we know. But few will join us at present. Yet we are in contact with many. Whilst firmly asserting our own faith and rules of practice, and heartily trying to make our life accordant with them, we may treat all others around us, be their faith or practice what it may, with respect; they are men with human sympathies and under strong temptations, and with but slight aids to withstand them. Let us seek, then, to take them at the point we find them, understand that, and without impatience try to urge them on from that point, not too abruptly severing them from their past. Where they express a want for what we can offer, there we freely offer it; where they do not, let us act on their present condition as we best may, here a little and there a little. Our business is, in fact, to convert where we can, but to serve all, whether they join us or no. And this the character of our faith enables us to do without any compromise or duplicity.

For myself, I have been met, as a general rule, in a spirit which I can hardly think generous, even when I have not been attacked with personal abuse. I can promise my assailants that I will never fight them with their own weapons. I can promise them that no attack shall ever draw from me a direct answer, but that each one, when worth considering, shall lead me more carefully to examine my own position, and to

endeavour to set it forth more clearly and convincingly to others. Each attack shall, in fact, be a stimulus to renewed exertion, so long as I am capable of exertion. When I believed and preached the faith of Christ, I gave no reluctant or timid service. This I may confidently say. When later I doubted that faith, yet had accepted no other, when, therefore, whatever work I could do could be done only in the general faith that what was good, and true, and beautiful would ultimately be clear, I say with equal confidence that whilst I regret many things I said and did, yet my service was in spirit at least not grudgingly given, that where I saw my way I spoke and acted uncompromisingly. In the new period of my life on which I have entered, and so long as it shall last; in the new religion which I preach with the most cordial assent and the fullest satisfaction—satisfaction for whatever energies, or intellect, or feelings are left me—I feel that my service will be only different in form, the same in spirit. As I look back on my work, and such writings as I have published, I cannot but think that my adversaries have been mistaken in their tactics, that a less personal warfare would have been wiser. To that I now invite them. The contest will, I foresee, be hot enough. So long as men are merely negative they are tolerated, or meet with secret sympathy; but when the work of reconstruction begins, when we offer something positive as a basis, the character of the struggle changes, and it will be war to the knife. I shrink not from such war, but it is the interest of all parties to strip it as far as is practicable of its evil features. In the cause to which I have devoted myself I would fight with all possible courtesy.

Thoughts crowd in on me on an occasion like the present. I cannot express all. I have endeavoured to give a general idea of our faith, its origin, its foun-

der, the position of its disciples in England, viewed in itself and in reference to their opponents. Other subjects must be reserved for other similar occasions, or for utterance in other ways. I would end to-day by a return to the point from which I set out. I would return to him whose birth we commemorate; to him and to her whose love he so highly valued, to whose influence he attributed such a powerful modification of his work. Each separate part of this discourse should but make us feel more profound gratitude for the joint services of these great benefactors of their race; gratitude to him who set forth Humanity to man, gratitude to her who supported him by her affection, and, as I said above, revealed him to himself. As time passes their names shall brighten; we can but anticipate by imagination the benefits of their services to our posterity, and the fulness of its gratitude. In the present sense of the benefits gained, in the enjoyment of the regeneration of which we see but the faint beginnings, that posterity will seek and find an adequate expression for that gratitude. At the close of the long preparation of our race, at the commencement of the new era, surrounded by the great who preceded them, and who shall have followed them, in high pre-eminence will stand the pair from whom we date the foundation of our religion—Clotilde de Vaux and Auguste Comte. Nor may we separate those whom he has associated—the two who with Madame de Vaux are commemorated on the tomb in which for a time he rests—his mother, and his adopted daughter. The first we know but through him, but his grateful and reverent remembrance is sufficient to ensure our honour. The second some of us are privileged to know, and are enabled to appreciate the singular beauty of her lofty yet self-denying and humble love to him, and not to him only, but towards all who share his faith.

In conclusion, I turn from her chosen servants and organs to Humanity, the power whom we serve, in whose name we are met to-day. We repeat our acknowledgment that we owe to her whatever we are; we repeat our resolution to consecrate to her cause all our powers. This is our reasonable service, and in the discharge of it we have great encouragement. We pray that we may not be found wanting, each in his several station—each according to his opportunities soundly estimated. We pray that we may feel the influence of the holy faith we preach; that we may be led by it to all good in thought, word, and deed; that we may discipline ourselves—our heart, our intellect, our character—not suffering ourselves to commit the common error, and neglect ourselves and our own change into good whilst we are endeavouring to reform others; but fully sensible that efforts upon others are but hypocrisy unless accompanied by constant efforts on ourselves. So may we grow purer, and gentler, and more loving, at the same time that we grow wiser, and firmer, and more enduring. So shall we modify, even where we do not win.

In communion with the illustrious dead, and still more living communion with those whom we have ourselves known and loved, in sympathy with all men and the world without us, in loving obedience and resignation to the laws of our own nature and of that outer world, in loving acceptance of our destiny, we may feel, and think, and act, we may find peace ourselves and do useful service to others.

May the blessing of Humanity be with you all.

