

# THE POSITIVIST PROBLEM.

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THE interest which the system known as Positivism awakens in public attention is so vastly in excess of any knowledge of the writings of Comte, and of any attempts at propagandism made by his followers, that it may afford matter for some curious reflection. On the one hand, we have one of the most voluminous if not the most elaborate of all modern philosophies, composed in a foreign language and a highly technical style. Those who have honestly studied, or even actually read, these difficult works may be numbered on the hand; and no methodical exposition of them exists in this country. The full adherents of this system in England are known to be few; and they but very rarely address the public. Among the regular students of Comte two or three alone find means occasionally to express their views, and that for the most part on special subjects. Such is the only medium through which the ideas of Comte are promulgated—a mass of writings practically unread; a handful of disciples for the most part silent.

On the other hand, the press and society, platform and pulpit, are continually resounding with criticism, invective, and moral reflection arrayed against this system. Reviews devote article after article to demonstrate anew the absurdity or the enormity of these views. The critics cut and thrust at will, well knowing that there is no one to retaliate; secure of the field to themselves, they fight the battle o'er again; thrice have they routed all their foes, and thrice they slay the slain. Religious journalism, too, delights to use the name of Comte as a sort of dark relief to the glowing colors of the Scarlet Woman. Semi-religious journals detect his subtle influence in everything, from the last poem to the coming revolution. Drowsy congregations are warned against doctrines from which they run as little risk as they do from that of Parthenogenesis, and which they are yet less likely to understand. Society even knows all about it, and chirrup the last gossip or jest at afternoon tea-tables. Yet even under this the philosophy of Comte survives; for criticism of this kind, it need hardly be said, is not for the most part according to knowledge.

Some such impression is left by the glaring inconsistencies which appear among the critics themselves. They have so easy a time of it in

piling up charges against Positivism, that they, in a great degree, dispose of each other. According to some, for instance, it would promote a perfect pandemonium of anarchy. With others it means only the "paralyzing and iron rule of law." With some it is the concentration of all human energy on self; with others, an Utopia which is to eliminate self from human nature. Now it is to crush out of man every instinct of veneration for a superior being; now it is to enthral him in a superstitious devotion. The followers of Comte are at once the votaries of disorder and of arbitrary power; of the coldest materialism and the most ideal sentimentalism; they are blind to everything but the facts of sensation, yet they foster the most visionary of hopes; they execrate all that is noble in man, and yet dream of human perfectibility. In a word, they are anarchists or absolutists; pitiless or maudlin; materialists or transcendentalists, as it may suit the palette of the artist to depict them.

Now all of these things cannot be true together. If it is proved to the satisfaction of a thousand critics that Positivism is a mass of absurdity, why need we hear so much about it? How can that still be dangerous which is hardly ever heard of but in professed refutations, and known only through adverse critics? It is strange that a writer, as they tell us, of obscure French, such as no one can make sense of, who finds in this country but an occasional student, should need such an army to annihilate him. If he were responsible for one-tenth of the contradictory views which are put into his mouth, he is self-condemned already. No house so divided against itself could stand, to say nothing of the critical batteries which thunder on it night and day—religious, scientific, literary champions without stint, warning an intelligent public against a new mystery of abominations. "Dearly beloved," cries the priest, "beware of this soul-destroying doctrine of Humanity!" "Science has not a good word for it," cries the man of physics, "to say nothing of its irreligion!" and so makes a truce with the man of God. "And literature has a thousand ill names for it," cry out the brazen tongues of the press through all its hundred throats of brass. Yet, withal, the thoughts of Comte seem still to live and grow, to flourish without adherents, and to increase without apostles. They must be in some way in the air; for all that men see is the refutation of that which none study, the smiting of those who do not contend. *E pur si muove!*

Those to whom the system of Comte is of serious moment would be but of a poor spirit if they lost heart under such a combination of assaults, or took pleasure in the signs of so wide-spread an interest. A perpetual buzzing about a new system of thought can as little do it good as it can do it harm. The students of Comte would be foolishly sanguine if they set this down to real study or serious interest in his system. They would be culpably weak if they supposed it was due to any efforts of their own to extend it.

However much Positivism may desire the fullest discussion, little can come of criticism which does not pretend to start with effective study. As a system it demands far too much both in the way of sustained thought and of practical action, to gain by becoming merely a subject of social or literary *causerie*. The platoon firing of the professional critics, and the buzz of the world, may become fatiguing; but both in the main are harmless, and in any case appear to be inevitable.

But when we look below the surface a different view will appear. However few are they who avow Positivism completely, its spirit permeates all modern thought. Those who teach the world have all learnt something from it. The awe-struck interest it arouses in truly religious minds shows how it can touch the springs of human feeling. Men of the world are conscious that it is a power clearly organic, and that it is bent on results. And even the curiosity of society bears witness that its ideas can probe our social instincts to the root.

It cannot, indeed, be denied that so general an interest in this subject is itself a significant fact; and though it be not due to anything like a study of Comte, and most certainly to nothing that is done by his adherents, it has beyond question a cause. This cause is that the age is one of Construction—and Positivism is essentially constructive. Men in these times crave something organic and systematic. Ideas are gaining a slow but certain ascendancy. There is abroad a strange consciousness of doubt, instability, and incoherence; and, withal, a secret yearning after certainty and reorganization in thought and in life. Even the special merits of this time, its candor, tolerance, and spirit of inquiry, exaggerate our consciousness of mental anarchy, and give a strange fascination to anything that promises to end it.

We have passed that stage of thought in which men hate or despise the religious and social beliefs they have outgrown—their articles of religion, constitutions of State, and orders of society. We feel the need of something to replace them more and more sadly, and day by day we grow more honestly and yet tenderly ashamed of the old faiths we once had. At bottom mankind really longs for something like a rule of life, something that shall embody all the phases of our multiform knowledge, and yet slake our thirst for organic order. Now there is, it may be said without fear, absolutely nothing which pretends to meet all these conditions—but one thing, and that is Positivism. There are, no doubt, religions in plenty, systems of science, theories of politics, and the like; but there is only one system which takes as its subject all sides of human thought, feeling, and action, and then builds these up into a practical system of life. Hence it is that, however imperfectly known, Positivism is continually presenting itself; and though but little studied, and even less preached, it ceases not to work. It proposes some solution to the problem which is silently calling for an answer in the depths of every vigorous mind that has ceased to be satisfied with the past. It states the problem at least, and nothing else does even

this. Thus, in spite of every distortion from ignorance or design, the scheme of Positivism has such affinity for the situation that it is ever returning to men's view. For whilst mankind, in the building of the mighty tower of Civilization, seem for the time struck as if with a confusion of purpose, and the plan of the majestic edifice for the time seems lost or forgotten, ever and anon there grows visible to the eye of imagination the outline of an edifice in the future, of harmonious design and just proportion, filling the mind with a sense of completeness and symmetry.

An interest thus wide and increasing in a system so very imperfectly known, proves that it strikes a chord in modern thought. And as among those who sit in judgment on it there must be some who honestly desire to give it a fair hearing, a few words may not be out of place to point out some of the postulates, as it were, of the subject, and some of the causes which may account for criticisms so incessant and so contradictory. It need hardly be said that these words are offered not as by authority, or *ex cathedra*, from one who pretends to speak in the name of any body or any person whatever. They are some of the questions which have beset the path of one who is himself a disciple and not an apostle, and the answers which he offers are simple suggestions proposed only to such as may care to be fellow-hearers with him.

It is of the first importance for any serious consideration of Positivism to know what is the task it proposes to itself. For the grounds on which it is attacked are so strangely remote, and appear to be so little connected, that perhaps no very definite conception exists of what its true scope is. There is much discussion now as to its scientific dogmas, now as to its forms of worship, now as to its political principles. But Positivism is not simply a new system of thought. It is not simply a religion—much less is it a political system. It is at once a philosophy and a polity; a system of thought and a system of life; the aim of which is to bring all our intellectual powers and our social sympathies into close correlation. The problem which it proposes is twofold: to harmonize our conceptions and to systematize human life; and furthermore, to do the first *only for the sake of the second*.

Now this primary notion stands at the very root of the matter, and if well kept in view it may spare much useless discussion and many hard words. Thus viewed, Positivism is really not in competition with any other existing system. It is hardly in contrast with any, because none is *in pari materia*—none claims the same sphere. No extant religion professes to cover the same ground, and therefore with none can Positivism be placed in contrast. Christianity, whatever it may have claimed in the age of Aquinas and Dante, certainly in our day does not profess to harmonize the results of science and methodize thought. On the contrary, it is one of the boasts of Christianity that its work is accomplished in the human heart, whatever be the forms of thought and even of society. It cannot therefore be properly contrasted with Posi-



tivism, for they are essentially disparate, and the function claimed by the one is not that claimed by the other.

So, too, Positivism is hardly capable of comparison with any existing philosophy. There are many systems of science and methods of thought before the world, but they insist on being heard simply as such, and not as being also religions, or schemes of life. They stand before the judgment-seat of the intellect, and they call for sentence from it according to its law. Such social or moral motive as they rest on is adequately supplied in the love of truth and the general bearing of knowledge on human happiness. Their doctrines ask to stand or fall on their own absolute strength, and are not put forward as a mere introduction to a form of life. Not but what, of course, philosophers, ancient and modern, have elaborated practical applications of their teaching to life. But no modern philosophy, as such, puts itself forth as a part of a larger system, as a mere foundation on which to build the society, as a major premise only in a strict syllogism of which the conclusion is action. Now this the Positive philosophy does. Positivism therefore is not a religion, for its first task was to found a complete system of philosophy: nor is it a philosophy, for its doctrines are but the intellectual basis of a definite scheme of life: nor a polity, for it makes political progress but the corollary of moral and intellectual movements. But, though being itself none of these three, it professes to comprehend them all, and that in their fullest sense. Thus it stands essentially alone, a system in antagonism strictly with none, the function and sphere of which is claimed by no other as its own.

Criticism which ignores this primary point, which deals with a system as if its end were something other than it is, can hardly be worth much. And thus viewed, a mass of popular objections fall to the ground. For instance, a continual stumbling-block is found in political institutions and reforms which Positivism proposes—institutions which are wholly alien, it is true, to our existing political atmosphere, and which could hardly exist in it, or would be actively noxious. But these are proposed by Positivism only on the assumption that they follow on and complete an intellectual, social, and moral reorganization by which society would be previously transformed, and for which an adequate machinery is provided. No value can attach therefore to any judgment on the political institutions *per se*, torn from the soil in which they are to be planted, crudely judged by the political tone of the hour. No serious judgment is possible until the social and intellectual basis on which they are to be built has been comprehended and weighed, and found to be inadequate or impossible. But this is what he who criticises the system from a special point of view is unwilling or unable to do.

So with the philosophy—we often hear indignant protests against the attempt made by Comte to organize the investigation of nature. Nothing is easier than to show that the organization proposed might

check the discovery of some curious facts, or the pursuits of certain seekers after truth. But the same would be true of any organization whatever. The problem of human life is not to secure the greatest accumulation of knowledge, or the vastest body of truth, but that which is most valuable to man; not to stimulate to the utmost the exercise of the intelligence, but to make it practically subservient to the happiness of the race. The charge therefore that the Positive philosophy would set boundaries to the intellect by setting it a task, is not to the purpose, even if it were true. This might be said of almost every religion and any system of morality. The very point in issue is whether the true welfare of mankind is best secured by the absolute independence of the mind, going to and fro like the wind which bloweth whither it listeth.

Thus, too, in criticising the religious side of Positivism, it is argued that it fails to provide for this or that emotion or yearning of the religious spirit; that it leaves many a solemn question unanswered, and many a hope unsatisfied, and has no place for the mystical and the Infinite, for absolute goodness, or power, or eternity. Be it so. The objection might have weight if Positivism were offering a new form of theology, or came forward simply as a new sort of religion. But the problem before us is this—whether these ideas can find a place in any religion which is to be in living harmony with a scientific philosophy. We are called on to decide whether, since these notions are repugnant to rational philosophy, religion and thought must forever be divorced, and whether we must choose thought without religion, or religion without thought. Positivism, if it has no place for the mystical or supernatural, has the widest field for the Ideal and the Abstract. It holds out the utmost reach for any intensity of sentiment. Nor could its believers fail in a boundless vista of hope; of hope which, while it is substantial and real, is not less ardent, and far more unselfish, than the ideals of older faiths. Positivism maintains that supposing established such a scientific and moral philosophy as it conceives, inspiring a community so full of practical energies and social sympathies as that which it creates, a rational religion is possible, but such hopes and yearnings would be practically obsolete, supplanted by deeper and yet purer aspirations. They would perish of inanition in a mind or a society really imbued with the relative and social spirit. They had no place under the practical morality and social life of past ages. They would have none, it argues, under the scientific philosophy and the public activity of the future. The truth of this expectation cannot possibly be estimated without a thorough weighing both of the philosophy and of the polity which it is proposed to found, and a very systematic comparison of their combined effects.

To treat philosophy, religion, or polity without regard to the place each holds in the general synthesis, is simply to beg the question. It is much more to the purpose to argue that the general synthesis which



Positivism proposes to create is not needed at all, or even if needed, is perfectly chimerical. Certainly it is a question which cannot be discussed here; and perhaps it is one which cannot be settled by any discussion at all. It seems one of those ultimate questions which can only be determined by the practical issue, and which no *à priori* argument can touch. *Solvetur ambulando*. It has been most vigorously treated by Mr. Mill in his estimate of Positivism, and, like all that he has said on this subject, deserves the most diligent thought. After all, it may be the truth that this question of questions—if human life be or be not reducible to one harmony—is one of those highest generalizations which the future alone can decide, and which no man can decide to be impossible until it has been proved so.

In any case, those who have no mind to busy themselves with any system of life or synthesis of social existence whatever—and they are the great bulk of mankind—may well be asked to spare themselves many needless protestations. Positivism most certainly will not trouble them; and the world is wide enough for them all. Still less need of passionate disclaimers and attacks have all they who are honestly satisfied with their religious and social faith as it is. Positivism looks on their convictions with the most sincere respect, and shrinks from wounding or disturbing the very least of them. How much waste of energy and serenity might be spared to many conscientious persons if these simple conditions were observed! Positivism is in its very essence unaggressive and non-destructive; for it seeks only to build up, and to build up step by step. It must appeal to very few at present, for the first of its conditions—the need of a new System of Life—is as yet admitted only by a few. It must progress but slowly as yet, for its scheme is too wide to be compatible with haste. If all of those who are alien to anything like a new order of human life, and all those who are satisfied with the order they have lived under would go their own way and leave Positivism to those who seek it, a great deal of needless irritation and agitation would be happily averted. The idea that thought and life may some day on this earth be reduced to organic order and harmony may be Utopian, but is it one so grotesque that it need arouse the tiresome horseplay of every literary trifle? And though there be men so unwise as to search after this Sangreal in a moral and intellectual reform, is their dream so anti-social as to justify an organized hostility which amounts to oppression? Incessant attempts to crush by the weight of invective, fair or unfair, a new system of philosophy, which appeals solely to opinion, and which numbers but a handful of adherents for the most part engaged in study, are not the highest forms of intelligent criticism. Positivism as a system has nothing to say to any but the very few who are at once disbelievers in the actual systems of faith and life, and are believers in the possibility of such a system in the future. To the few who seek it, it presents a task, as it fairly warns them, requiring prolonged patience and labor. The rest it will scarcely

trouble unless they seek it; and perhaps it will be better that they should leave it alone. Little can come of eternally discussing the solution of a problem which men have no wish to see solved, or of multiplying objections to what they have no mind to investigate.

Positivism, then, consists of a philosophy, a religion, and a polity; and to regard it as being any one of these three singly, or to criticise any one of them separately, is simple waste of time. Its first axiom is, that all of these spheres of life suffer from their present disorder, because hitherto no true synthesis has been found to harmonize them. This axiom is obviously one which must meet with opposition, and in any case be very slowly accepted. The very notion of system and organization implies subordination in the parts, submission to control, and mutual concession. The unbounded activity, independence, and freedom of the present age, not to say its anarchy and incoherence, quiver, it seems, in every nerve at the least show of discipline. Yet any species of organization involve discipline, and any discipline involves some restraint. Of course, therefore, any scheme to organize thought and life presented in an age of boundless liberty and individualism meets opposition at every point. To show that Positivism involves a systematic control over thought and life is not an adequate answer to it. To prove of a new system that *it is a system* is not a final settling the question until you have first proved that no system can be good. All civilization and every religion, all morality and every kind of society, imply some restraint and subordination. The question—and it is a question which cannot be decided off-hand—is whether more is implied in the system of Positivism than is involved in the very notion of a synthesis, or a harmony co-extensive with human life.

It is worthy of notice how entirely new to modern thought is this cardinal idea of Positivism—that of religion, science, and industry working in one common life—how little such an idea can be grasped in the light of the spirit of the day! Yet so far is it from being an extravagant vision, that it sleeps silently in the depths of every brain which ever looks into the future of the race. None but they who dwell with regret on the past, or are engrossed in the cares of the present, doubt but what the time will come when the riddle of social life will be read, and the powers of man work in unison together; when thought shall be the prelude only to action or to art, and action and art be but the realization of affection and emotion; when brain, heart, and will have but one end, and that end be the happiness of man on earth. And thus while priest, professor, and politician forswear the scheme which Positivism offers, and society resounds with criticism and refutation, none believe it overcome or doubt its vitality; for it remains the only conception which pretends to satisfy an undying aspiration of the soul.

Whether the pursuit of system or harmony be carried out by Comte extravagantly or not is, no doubt, a question of the first importance.



It is certainly one which there is no intention of discussing here. But in any case it is not to be decided lightly. Mr. Mill, as has been said, has argued this question with all that power which in him is exceeded only by his candor. But which of the other critics have done the like? A criticism like that of Mr. Mill is a totally different thing, and worthy of all attention. Nor must it be forgotten how largely, in criticising Positivism, he accepts its substantial bases. Nothing can be more disingenuous than to appeal to the authority of Mr. Mill as finally disposing of the social philosophy of Comte, when Mr. Mill has adhered to so much of the chief bases of that philosophy in general, and has warmly justified some of the most vital features of the social system. A system may be false, but it is not false solely because it is a system. It might very possibly be that harmony had only been attained by Positivism at the expense of truth or life, by doing violence to the facts of Nature, or by destroying liberty of action. But this is a matter depending so much on a multitude of combined arguments and on such general considerations, that it can be decided only after long and patient study. It clearly cannot be done piecemeal or at first sight. And of all questions is the one in which haste and exaggeration are most certain to mislead.

Let us follow a little further each of the three sides of Positivism—the Philosophy, the Religion, the Polity—in order, but not independently, so as to put before us the goal they propose to win and the main obstacles in their path. The grand end which it proposes to philosophy is to give organic unity to the whole field of our conceptions, whether in the material or in the moral world, to order all branches of knowledge into their due relations, and hence to classify the sciences. Even if the unthinking were to regard this project as idle or extravagant, every instructed mind well knows that it is involved in the very nature of philosophy, and has been its dream from the first. Can it be necessary to argue that the very meaning of philosophy is to give system to our thoughts? What are laws of nature but generalizations? what are generalizations but a multitude of facts referred to a common idea? what is science but the bringing the manifold under the one? Knowledge itself is but the study of relations; and the highest knowledge, the study of the ultimate relations.

And as science has no meaning but the systematizing of separate ideas, so the grand systematizing of all ideas has been the ceaseless aim of philosophy. What else were the strange but luminous hypotheses of the early Greeks? what else was the colossal task of Aristotle? what else that of the elder Bacon and his coevals, of the other Bacon, of Descartes, of Leibnitz, of the Encyclopædists, of Hegel?

That order is the ultimate destiny of all our knowledge is so obvious that the effort to found it at once can be met only by one objection worthy of an answer, and that is that the aim is premature. It is very easy to see that the earlier attempts, when even astronomy was in-



complete and the moral sciences outside the pale of law, were utterly premature. But whether the task is premature now is entirely different. After all, it is one of those questions which no *à priori* argument can affect. It is not premature if it can be even approximately done. Yet the mere suggestion of it arouses a myriad-headed opposition. In every science and every sub-section of a science a specialist starts forth to tell us that generations of observers are needed to exhaust even his own particular corner in the field of knowledge. And if one science is to become but the instrument of another, if one kind of inquiry is to be subordinated to another, we should fetter, they tell us, the freedom which has led to so many brilliant discoveries, and leave unsolved many a curious problem.

The answer of Positivism is simply this: If the systematizing of knowledge will be premature before all this is accomplished, it will always be premature. The end for which we are to wait is one utterly chimerical. No doubt there are no bounds to knowledge, any more than there are bounds to the universe. As Aristotle says, thus one would go on for ever without result; so that the search will be fruitless and vain. Nay, if we go by quantity, estimate our knowledge now as compared with the facts of the universe, we are but children still playing on the shore of an infinite sea. If, before philosophy can be formed into a systematic whole, every phenomenon which the mind can grasp in the inorganic or in the organic world has to be first examined—every atom which microscope can detect, every nebula which telescope can reach—if every living thing has to be analyzed down to the minutest variation of its tissues, from infinitesimal protozoa to palaeontologic monsters—if every recorded act, word, or thought of men has to be first exhausted before the science of sciences can begin—the task is hopeless, for the subject is infinite. A life of toil may be baffled by the problems to be found in one drop of turbid water. Ten generations of thinkers might perish before they had succeeded in explaining all that it is conceivable science might detect on a withered leaf. And whole academies of historians would not suffice fully to raise the veil that shrouds a single human life.

Were science pursued indefinitely on this scale, not only would the earth not contain all the books that should be written, but no conceivable brain could grasp, much less organize, the infinite maze. The task of organization would thus be made more hopeless each day, and philosophy would be as helpless as Xerxes in the midst of his countless hosts. The radical difference between the point of view of the positive and the current philosophy, that which feeds the internecine conflict between them, is that between the relative and the absolute. Looked at from the absolute point of view—that is, as the phenomena of matter and life present themselves from without—the task of exhausting the knowledge of them is truly infinite, and that of systematizing them is truly hopeless. From the relative point of view philosophy is called

on to exist, not for its own sake, but as the immediate minister of life. To utilize it, and to organize in order to utilize it, is of far higher importance than to extend it. It judges the value of truths, not by the degree of intellectual brilliancy they exhibit, or the delight they afford to the imagination, but by their relation, in a broad sense, to the problem of human happiness. Till this great problem is nearer its solution, Positivism is content to leave many a problem yet unsolved and many a discovery unrevealed. It sees life to be surrounded by such problems as by an atmosphere "measureless to man;" for life rests ever like an island girt by an ocean of the Insoluble, and hangs like our own planet, a firm and solid spot suspended in impenetrable space.

What is the test of true knowledge, when phenomena, facts, and therefore truths, are actually infinite? The fact that this or that gas has been detected in a fixed star is, no doubt, a brilliant discovery in the absolute point of view; but, in the relative, it might possibly turn out to be a mere feat of scientific gymnastic—the answer to a scientific puzzle. The discoverer of many a subtle problem may be, absolutely speaking, entitled to the honor of mankind; but relatively, if his problem is valueless, he may have been wasting his time and his powers. Hence the special professors of every science are the first to resent the principles and the judgments of the relative mode of thought. They cannot endure that their intellectual achievements should be judged by any but scientific standards, or their inquiries directed by any but scientific motives. The whole conception of the relative method differs from theirs. It calls for the solution first of those problems in each science which a systematic philosophy of them all indicates as the most fruitful sources of inquiry: it enjoins the following of one study and science for the sake of and as minister to another, and of all for the sake of establishing a rational basis for human life and activity. And this not in the vague general spirit that all knowledge is good, and all discoveries useful to man, and no one can tell which or how. The same objection was brought against Aristotle and Bacon when they proposed their *Organa*, or clues to inquiry. All truths may have *some* value, but they are not equally valuable. The claim of the relative is to test their value by a system of referring them to human necessities. It sees the life of man stumbling and wandering for the want of a foundation and guide of certain and organized knowledge. Each hour the want of a rational philosophy to direct and control our social activity is more pressing, yet the absolute spirit in science, vain-glorious and unmindful of its function, shakes off the idea of a yoke-fellow, and widens the gulf between thought and life by solitary flights amidst worlds of infinite phenomena.

It is sometimes pretended—it must be said rather perversely—that this relative conception of science is akin to the stifling of thought by the Catholic Church. It is of course true that the Holy Inquisition, like most dominant religions, did claim the right, in virtue of its



divine mission, of dictating to the intellect certain subjects as forbidden ground, and warning it off from these limits; it dictated to the intellect the conclusions which it was required to establish, and the methods it was permitted to use—and this not on intellectual, but on religious and supernatural grounds. Positivism neither dictates to the intellect nor hampers its activity. It calls on it on grounds of philosophy, and on demonstrable principles, to work in its own free light; but by that light, and at its own discretion, to choose those spheres and to follow those methods that shall combine harmoniously with a scheme of active life as systematic as itself. This is utterly distinct from the slavery of the mind, according to the Catholic or any other religious notion. The comparison is as simple a sophistry as to argue that it is slavery in the will deliberately to follow the dictates of conscience.

No one who has given the subject a second thought can suppose that Positivism, in bringing the intellect into intimate union with the other sides of human nature for the direct object of human happiness, intends thereby to confine it to the material uses of life, or to refer every thought to some immediate practical end. The former is mere materialism; the second simple empiricism; and both utterly unphilosophical. On the contrary, by far the noblest part of the task of the mind is to minister to moral and spiritual needs. And by far the most of its efforts are employed in strengthening its own powers, and amassing the materials for long series of deductions. Philosophy, as Positivism conceives it, would annihilate itself by becoming either material or empirical. Its business is to systematize the highest results of thought; but those results are the highest which are most essential to, and can be assimilated best by, human life as a whole. And no system can be the true one but as it orders all thoughts in relation, first to each other, and, secondly, in relation to every power of man.

Can it be needful again to say that the attempt of Positivism to systematize the sciences is very far from implying that there is but one science and one method, or that it would reduce all knowledge to one set of laws. Its chief task has been to show the boundaries of the sciences, to classify the different methods appropriate to each, and to point out how visionary are all attempts at ultimate generalizations. When men of science tell us that processes of reasoning are used indiscriminately in all sciences, and that all scientific questions are ultimately referable to one set of laws, they are going back to the infancy of philosophy, effacing all that has been done to analyze reasoning, and attempting, as of old, to reach some chimerical, because universal, principle. It is but the materialist phase of the metaphysical problem. Supposing all questions of science, including all social questions, as has been proposed, not apparently in jest, could be reduced to questions of molecular physics, how would this serve human life more than if they were reduced to air, water, or fire? The end of specialism is at hand

if science is looking for some ultimate principle of the universe. The search is equally unpractical, whether it be pursued by crude guessing or by microscopes and retorts. It would not help us if we knew it; and as Aristotle says of Plato's idea, the highest principle would contain none under it. It would be so general as to support no practical derivatives. Like all extreme abstractions, it would bear no fruit.

Turn on whichever side we will, we meet this conflict between the relative and the absolute point of view. The absolute burns for new worlds to conquer; the relative insists that the empire already won, before all things, be reduced to order, and knowledge systematized in order to be applied. The absolute calls us to admire its brilliant discoveries; the relative regrets that such efforts were not spent in discovering the needful thing. The absolute claims entire freedom for itself; the relative asks that its labors be directed to a systematic end.

It is the old question between individual and associated effort—the spontaneous and the disciplined—the special and the general point of view. We might imagine the case of a general with a genius for war, such as Hannibal or Napoleon, carrying on a campaign with a heterogeneous host and a staff of specialist subordinates. He desires to learn the shape of a country, the powers of his artillery, the fortification of his camp, or the engineering of his works. He seeks to master each of these arts himself, so far as he has means, and for his ultimate end. But with his specialists he wages a constant struggle. His geographer has a thousand points still to observe to complete his survey. His engineers start curious problems in physics, and each science has its own work, as each captain of irregulars may have his pet plan. It may be true that much may be needed before any of the branches can be thoroughly done; and the scheme of some subordinate officer might possibly destroy a certain number of the enemy. But the true general knows that all these things are good only in a relative manner. His end is victory, or rather conquest.

Thus it is not only intelligible, but quite inevitable, that Positivism should meet the stoutest opposition from the science of the day, not only in details and in estimates, but even in general conceptions, and yet not be unscientific. The strictures of men even really eminent in special departments are precisely what every system must encounter which undertakes the same task. That all such should make them, more especially if they be inclined to theology, or devotees of individualism, is so entirely natural that any answer in detail must be an endless task. By their fruits you shall know them. Let us see them produce a system of thought more harmonious in itself and more applicable to the whole of human life. Every new philosophy which proposes to change the very point of view of thought has always incurred fierce opposition. Every new religion and social system has seemed to its predecessors an evil and cruel dream. How much more a system which involves at once a new philosophy, a new religion, and a new society; which brings

to thought a change greater than that wrought by Bacon or Descartes; which draws a spiritual bond vaster and deeper than that which was conceived by Paul, and founds a social system that differs from our own more than the modern differs from the ancient world.

Whether the actual solution of the problem of systematizing thought as worked out by Comte in all its sides, his statement of natural laws, and his classification of the sciences, be adequate or true, is a matter which it is far from our present purpose to discuss. It would be foreign to our immediate aim, and impossible within our present limits. But there is a stronger reason. It would be simple charlatanry in one without due scientific education to undertake such a task as that of examining and reviewing a complete encyclopædia of science. The natural philosophy of Comte is a matter which no one could undertake to justify in all its bearings without a systematic study of each science in turn. Looking at it from the point of view of philosophy, and with that relative spirit which the sense of social necessities involves, a diligent student of the system, who seeks to satisfy his mind on it as a whole, can form a sufficient opinion, at least so far as to compare its results with any other before us. After very carefully considering the strictures passed on Comte's classification of the sciences and his statement of the principal laws, it does not appear to the writer that one of them will hold. If we are to shelter ourselves under authority, we may be content with that of M. Littré, Mr. Mill, and Mr. Lewes. We are too apt to forget the great distinction between philosophy and science, and the paramount title of the former. Men of science are far too ready to decide matters of philosophy by their own lights, matters which depend far less on knowledge of special facts than on the general laws and history of thought, and even of society. Nor does there appear to be any weight in some strictures which have recently been published in this Review on the positive law of the three stages and the classification of the sciences, the greater part of which objections have been already anticipated and refuted by Mr. Mill—part of which are obvious misconceptions of Comte, and part are transparent sophisms. On the whole, it may be fairly left to any one who seriously seeks for a philosophy of science, and is prepared to seek it with that patience and breadth of view which such a purpose requires, to decide for himself if he can discover any other solution of the problem, the general co-ordination of knowledge as a basis of action.

Let us now for a moment turn to the system viewed as a religion, not with the slightest intention of reviewing it, much less of advocating it, but simply to see what it is, and what it proposes to do. Its fundamental notion is that no body of truth, however complete, can effectually enlighten human life; no system of society can be stable or sound without a regular power of acting on the higher emotions. There are in human nature capacities which will not be second, and cannot be dispensed with. There are instincts of self-devotion and of



sympathy, love, veneration, and beneficence, which ultimately control human life, and alone can give it harmony. Though not the most active either in the individual character, or even in the social, these powers are in the long run supreme, because they are those only to which the rest can permanently and harmoniously submit. Each separate soul requires, to give unity to the exercise of its powers, a motive force outside of itself; for the highest of its powers are instinctively turned to objects without. The joint action of every society is in the long run due to sympathy, and to common devotion to some power on which the whole depends. There thus arises a threefold work to be accomplished—to give unity to the individual powers; to bind up the individuals into harmonious action; to keep that action true and permanent—unity, association, discipline. Without this the most elaborate philosophy might become purely unpractical or essentially immoral, the most active of societies thoroughly corrupt or oppressive, and the result throughout the whole sphere of life—discord. Nothing but the emotions remain as the original motive force of life in all its sides; and none of the emotions but one can bring all the rest and all other powers into harmony, and that is the devotion of all to a power recognized as supreme. To moralize both Thought and Action, by inspiring Thought with an ever-present social motive, by making Action the embodiment only of benevolence—such is the aim of religion as Positivism conceives it.

Now, without debating whether the mode in which Positivism would affect this be true or not, adequate or not, it is plainly what every system of religion in its higher forms has aimed at. And accordingly we see the singular attraction which this side of Positivism possesses for many orthodox Christians. It is entirely their own claim; and, indeed, there nowhere exists in the whole range of theological philosophy an argument on the necessity for and nature of religion in the abstract at all to be compared with that in the second volume of the "Politique Positive." Passing over the question whether Positivism has carried out this aim by methods either arbitrary or excessive, it is plain that every system which can claim to be an organized religion at all, has had a body of doctrine, a living object of devotion, observances of some kind, and an associated band of teachers. It is not easy to see how there could be anything to be rightly called a religion without them, or something with equivalent effect. A mere idea is not a religion, such as that of the various neo-Christian and Deist schools.

The hostility, therefore, which the religious scheme of Positivism awakens is one involved of necessity in the undertaking, and should count for very little until it is seen that its critics are prepared fairly to consider any such scheme at all. Those who are most disposed to feel any interest in the scientific or political doctrines of Positivism are just those who almost to a man reject worship, Church, and religion altogether. This, for the most part, they have done, not on any gen-

eral philosophical reasons, but simply from antipathy to those forms of devotion they find extant. Whether, in rejecting the actual forms of them now or hitherto presented, the very spirit of these institutions can be eliminated from human nature and from society, is a question which they care neither to ask nor to answer. But in treating of the Positive, or any scheme of religion, this is the question at issue. Nor must it be forgotten that so much is the vital spirit of all religious institutions extinct in modern thought, that even if the doctrines and ceremonies of existing churches escape ridicule by virtue of habit and association, forms less familiar, however rational in themselves, would be certain to appear ridiculous, as doctrines far more intelligible and capable of proof would appear chimerical to men accustomed to listen calmly even to the Athanasian Creed.

Fully to conceive the task which Positivism as a religion has set itself to accomplish, much more fairly to judge how its task has been done, requires the mind to be placed in a point of view very different from that of the actual moment. How little could the most cultivated men of antiquity, who never looked into the inner life of their time, estimate the force of early Christianity, or the most religious minds of the middle ages accept the results of modern enlightenment! What an effort of candor and patience would it have proved to any of these men to do justice to the system which was to supersede theirs, even if presented to their minds in its entirety and its highest form! It is inherent in the nature of every scheme which involves a great social change that it should bring into play or into new life powers of mankind hitherto dormant or otherwise directed. Whether it be right in so doing, or whether it do so to any purpose, is the question to decide; but it is a question the most arduous which can be put to the intelligence, and involves protracted labor and inexhaustible candor. Random criticism of any new scheme of religious union is of all things the most easy and the most worthless. It can only amuse the leisure of a trifler, but it deserves neither thought nor answer. Positivism in the plainest way announces what is its religious aim and basis. The partisans of the actual creeds may of course resist it by any means they think best. But as it certainly does not seek them, nor address any who are at rest within their folds, they cannot fairly complain of being scandalized by what they may find in it for themselves. Those who attack it from independent grounds show but small self-respect if they do so without accepting the first condition of their own good faith, which is patiently to weigh it as a whole. And those who fairly intend to consider it to any purpose may be assured that they are undertaking a very long and perplexing task; that much of it must necessarily seem repugnant to our intellectual tone. A system which professes to be co-extensive with life and based upon proof would be mere imposture if it could be accepted off-hand as true or false, if it did more than assert and illustrate general principles, or if it ended in closing the mind and leaving



man but a machine. The real point in issue is whether it be possible to direct mankind by a religion of social duty, if humanity as a whole—past, present, and to come—can inspire a living devotion, capable of permanently concentrating the highest forces of the soul; whether it be possible to maintain such a religion by appropriate observances and an organized education. This is the true problem for any serious inquirer, and not whether a number of provisions admittedly subordinate approve themselves to the first glance. To travestie a new system by exaggerating or isolating its details is a task as easy as it is shallow.

In its third aspect—that is, as a polity—what is it that Positivism proposes? It is a political system in harmony with a corresponding social and industrial system, tempered by a practical religion, and based upon a popular education. The leading conception is to subordinate politics to morals by bringing the practical life into accord with the intellectual and the emotional. The first axiom, therefore, is this—that permanent political changes cannot be effected without previous social and moral changes. This is a scheme which may be said to be wholly new in political philosophy. Every political system of modern times hitherto has proposed to produce its results by legislative, or at all events by practical changes, and has started from the point of view that the desired end could be obtained if the true political machinery could be hit upon. It is the starting-point of Positivism that no machinery whatever can effect the end without a thorough regeneration of the social system; and when that is done, the machinery becomes of less importance. The principal thing, then, will be to have the machinery as simple and as efficient as possible. Political action, like all practical affairs, must in the main depend on the practical instinct. And the chief care will be to give the greatest scope for the rise and activity of such powers. But as the social system is to be recast, not by the light of the opinion of the hour, but by a study of the human powers as shown over their widest field, so the leading principles in politics will find their rational basis in no corner of modern civilization, but in the history of the human race as a whole and a complete analysis of the human capacities.

Let us see what this involves. From the nature of its aim it cannot be revolutionary in the ordinary sense. The very meaning of revolution is a radical and sudden change in the constitution of the state. Now, apart from its condemnation of all revolutionary methods, Positivism insists that all political changes so made must prove abortive. But, besides this, it repudiates disorder as invariably evil, and insists that every healthy movement is nothing but the development of the past. But at the same time the change to which it looks is of the greatest extent and importance. It is thus the only systematic attempt to conciliate progress and order, one which effects revolutionary ends by a truly conservative spirit. Of all charges, therefore, that could be

made against Positivism, that of being anarchical is the most superficial. The attempt to connect it with disorder and sedition is scandalously unjust. To the charge of being reactionary the best answer is a simple statement of the future to which it looks forward. That it contemplates a benevolent despotism is an idle sneer, for it conceives the normal condition of public life as one in which the influence of public opinion is at its maximum, and the sphere of government at its minimum.

But just in proportion to the width of the system on which Positive politics rest is the degree of opposition which it awakens. Adapting to itself portions from each of the rival systems, it alienates each of them in turn. It is impossible to do justice to the greatness of past ages, and still more to revive anything from them, without offering a rock of offence to all the revolutionary schools. And it is impossible to propose a reorganization of society at all without alarming the conservative. These alternations of interest in and antipathy towards Positivist politics, these bitter attacks, these contradictory charges, belong of necessity to the undertaking, and need surprise no one. But those who profess to know what they undertake to criticise, those to whom all matters human and divine are open questions, who spend their time but to hear or to tell some new thing, such, one would think, would be careful that they understand the conditions on which a new system of thought is based.

This hasty outline of the task which Positivism undertakes—the mere statement of its problem—may suffice to explain the continual interest it excites, and also the incessant hostility it meets. Let any one fairly ask himself—if it be possible to accomplish such a task at all without necessarily provoking a storm of opposition, and if the success of the system as a whole could possibly be estimated without a patience which, it may be said, it almost never receives. The mere variety of the objects which it attempts to combine, while interesting men of the most opposite views, of necessity presents to each some which utterly repel him. It is impossible to reconcile a Babel of ideas without forcing on each hearer many which he is accustomed to repudiate. The man of science, who is attracted by the importance given to the physical laws, starts back when it is proposed to extend these laws to the science of society. The student of history, who sees the profound truth of the philosophy of history, is scandalized by the very idea of a creed of scientific proof. The politician for a time is held by the vision it presents of social reforms, but he is disgusted at hearing that he must take lessons from the past. The conservative delights to find his ancient institutions so truly honored, to be shocked when he finds that they are honored only that they may be the more thoroughly transformed. The man of religion is touched to find in such a quarter a profound defence of worship and devotion, only to be struck dumb with horror at a religion of mere humanity. The democrat, who hails



the picture of a regenerated society, turns with scorn from an attempt to lay the bases of temporal and spiritual authority. The reactionist fares no better; for if he finds some comfort in the new importance given to order, he dreads the results of an unqualified trust in popular education and the constant appeal to public opinion. Those whom the philosophy attracts, the religion repels. Those whom the moral theories strike shrink back from the science. Those who believe in the forces of religion are no friends of scientific laws. Those who care most for the progress of science are the first to be jealous of moral control. It is simply impossible, therefore, to address with effect all of these simultaneously without in turn wounding prejudices dear to each. It could not be that the sciences could be organized without hurting the susceptibilities of specialists everywhere, and it is the spirit of our time to create specialists. To bridge over the vast chasm between the Past and the Future, to co-ordinate the opinions and the emotions, to satisfy the heart as well as the brain, to reconcile truth with feeling, duty with happiness, the individual with society, fact and hope, order with progress, religion with science, is no simple task. The task may be looked on as hopeless, the solution of it may be derided as extravagant; but if it were presented to men "by an angel from heaven," it would sound strange to the bulk of hearers, men to whom such a notion is alien, who have sympathy neither with the object nor the mode of pursuing it. Hence the unthinking clamor which Positivism excites. To the pure conservative it offers a fair mark for fierce denunciation. To the jester it offers an opening for easy ridicule, for it offers to him many things on which he has never thought. But by a critic of any self-respect or intelligence it must be treated thoroughly, or not at all. There are persons devoid of any solid knowledge, of the very shreds of intellectual convictions, of any germ of social or religious sympathies,—specialists *ex hypothesi*,—to whom a serious effort to grapple with the great problem of Man on earth is but the occasion for a cultivated sneer, or a cynical appeal to the prejudices of the bigot. *Non ragioniam di lor.*

It must be plain to any one who gives all this a fair judgment that the students of Comte could not possibly suffice for all such controversies, were they ten times as numerous as they are. The critics of Positivism attack on a hundred quarters, and with every weapon, at once. Only those who seriously interest themselves in the progress of thought must remember that they are continually listening to mere travesties, which it is worth no man's while to expose, and to criticisms which no one cares to answer. They would have only themselves to blame if they choose to suppose that no answer could be given. Now and then some striking case of misrepresentation has to be dealt with; but, as a rule, the students of Comte are of necessity otherwise engaged. Controversy is alien to the whole genius of Positivism, for the range of objections in detail is entirely infinite. Positivism must make way,



if at all, like all efforts at construction, by its synthetic force, by its coherence, and its fitness for the situation. If it has this, it can be neither hindered nor promoted by any controversy, however brilliant as a performance.

It is not an infrequent comment that the points of the Positive system are so widely remote and heterogeneous, that it appears somewhat discursive. They are no doubt far apart from each other, and apparently, perhaps, disconnected. But it would be a most superficial view to regard them as desultory. Now and then these principles are heard of in matters of practical politics,—now in pure science, in religion, in industry, in history, or in philosophy. But this is a necessity of the case, and is a consequence of the connection between all these, which it is the aim of Positivism to enforce, and of their general dependence on common intellectual foundations. Its great principle is, that the errors hitherto committed are due to the separate treatment of these cognate phases of life and thought. And if it treats in turn very different subjects, it is by virtue of this very doctrine that each must be viewed in its relation to the other. That individuals defending these principles wander out of their course, and fall into inconsistencies, is their weakness, not that of the system. Positivism itself stands like an intrenched camp, presenting a continuous chain of works to the beleaguering forces around. Within its own circle the system of defence communicates immediately to, and radiates from, its centre, while the attack, being unorganized and ranged in a circle without, is spread over a vastly greater area. It stands as yet almost entirely by the strength of its own walls and the completeness of its works, and not by that of its defenders within.

Metaphor apart, let any one in common fairness consider what students of Comte have to meet. The philosophical basis alone covers a ground far apart from the ordinary education so wide that nothing but general views of it can be possible. To be intelligently convinced of the truth of the Positive Philosophy in a body in such a way as to be a capable exponent, requires, first, a previous preparation which very few have gained; and, secondly, a weighing of the system by that knowledge step by step, in bulk and in detail, which perhaps not five men in this country have chosen to give. It need not be said that the present writer has as little pretension to belong to one class as to the other. But there is no reason why men, positivist in spirit and in general aim, should feel bound to defend every point in turn in a vast body of philosophy for which they are not responsible, and which in its entirety they do not pretend to teach. A student of Positivism may hold that which he believes to be true without being concerned to maintain every suggestion of Comte's, which to the infinite wisdom of some critics may appear ridiculous. Deductions of the kind they are fond of treating are just what a serious student bent on mastering a body of principles leaves as open or indifferent matters, and trusts to the future to

decide. Besides, even on the assumption that many of these deductions, and even some of these principles, were preposterous or false, still, as Mr. Mill has well pointed out, the same might be said of every known philosopher. Aristotle, Bacon, and Descartes have sown their whole works broadcast with the wildest blunders. What a flood of cheap ridicule their contemporary critics had at their command! What a mass of absurdity might not a smart reader discover who for the first time were to glance through the Ethics of Aristotle, or the Organum of Bacon! Yet even if the system of Comte were as full of absurdities as those of these philosophers—which I am far from conceding—this would not prevent his philosophy from being as valuable a step in thought as any of the three. There seems a disposition to force men who become students of Comte and accept generally the Positive system, as they might in their day have accepted the Aristotelian or the Baconian philosophy, to defend every statement of Comte's, as if it were a question of verbal inspiration. It seems that men in this country are at liberty to profess themselves adherents of every system of thought but one. A man may—one or two do—study and uphold the principles of Hegel. Benthamism is a creed with living disciples. Mr. Mill may be called the chief of a school. A fair field is open to all of these, at least in any field which is open to freedom of thought. But if a man ventures to treat a public question avowedly from the Positive point of view, he is assailed by professed friends to free inquiry as if he were an enemy of the human race, to whom the ordinary courtesies are denied; and some of the commonest names that he will hear for himself are atheist, fanatic, and conspirator.

Respecting the actual adherents of Comte, perhaps a few words may be permitted, and, indeed, a few are required. It is not usual in this country to "picket" the ordinary doings of a school in politics or opinion, even though you do happen to differ from them. But in the case of Positivism it seems to be thought allowable to dispense with such scruples. Accordingly, the most ordinary utterance of one of those whom they dub as a member of the school is at once set down by anonymous persons as some fresh act of what they are pleased to call "this malignant sect." The mode in use is a very old, a very simple, but not a very candid plan: it consists only in this—the describing every one who has adopted any Positivist principle as a professed disciple of Comte; next, of attributing to each of such persons everything that any of them or that Comte has at any time countenanced; and lastly, of ascribing to Positivism and to Comte, every act and almost every word of any of these persons. And the world seems to relish any preposterous bit of gossip about Positivist churches and ceremonies, schemes, plots, and what not! One can hardly keep one's countenance in doing it, but it seems necessary to state that all this ill-natured gossip is the childish stuff such gossip invariably is. As to telling the world anything about the "sect"—"malignant" or other-



wise—there is nothing to tell. Whatever else may be true about Positivism, publicity is its very essence—*vivre au grand jour*—in thought, word, and deed, according to the motto of Comte; and every act and statement it makes is open to any one who cares to look. The utmost publicity about persons, congregations, rites, and preaching, by all means. But the gossip need not be untrue as well as impertinent. As is well known, Dr. Richard Congreve, who has adopted the system and practice of Comte in its entirety, has occasionally made an address to a small audience, and has subsequently published his discourse. He has also from time to time given a course of lectures open to the public. Those who like himself definitely accept Positivism as a religion, and regard themselves as a community, of whom it should be said the present writer is not one, occasionally have met together. But the various observances instituted by Comte are scarcely practicable here. It is obvious that it must be so. A religion, a worship, and an education such as Comte conceived them, are not possible in all their completeness without a body of persons and families steadily desirous of observing them. It need hardly be said that the materials for this do not as yet exist in this country. A system like Positivism does not easily receive complete adherents. It is not like any of the religious, political, or socialist systems—like Swedenborgianism or Communism—a simple doctrine capable of awakening a dominant fanaticism. It cannot possibly be preached beside a hedge or in a workshop, and gain converts by the score, like Methodism or Chartism. To promulgate it duly requires a fresh education, followed by a long course of systematic meditation. To form an honest and solid conviction upon a body of philosophy thus encyclopædic requires years of study. Accordingly, the number of those who have completely accepted the system of Comte as a religion, among whom it has been said the present writer cannot count himself, is small. To treat every student of Positivism and avowed adherent of Comte's system as a member of a sort of secret society, and then to pretend that this supposed society is engaged in a series of religious and political plots, the amusement of some busybodies, is an idle impertinence. These tales are worthy only of an imperialist journal describing an apparition of the Spectre Rouge. The fact that there are men not so nervously afraid of being associated with an unpopular cause as to be engaging in constant controversy or defence, is no honest ground for including them in a body to which they do not belong, for fastening on them any design, whether they have countenanced it or not, and any opinion, whether they adopt it or not. That there are men who think it their duty to say plainly what they think, and to say it always under the guarantee of their own names, is no good cause, though it makes it easy for masked opponents, to eke out the *argumentum ad rationem* by a free use of the *argumentum ad hominem*. If all such attacks, which are the portion of any man who dares to treat a question from the Positivist point of view,

are for the most part unanswered and unnoticed, the reason most assuredly is, not that they are true, but that they are unworthy of answer.

But enough of such matters. These petty questions of an hour are but dust in the balance by which this question must be weighed. However little it may be thought that Positivism has solved its problem, it can hardly be said that the time is not ripe for its task, that there is nothing that calls for solution. Into what a chaos and deadlock is opinion reduced in spiritual as in practical things! Who seriously looks for harmony to arise out of the Babel of sects which have arisen amid the *débris* of the Catholic Church? Or are any of the Pantheist or Deist dreams more likely to give unity to the human race? The dogmas of Christianity have been by some refined and adapted away until nothing is left of them but an aspiration. Can an aspiration master the wild confusion of brain and will? And has even the most unsparing of adaptations brought the ancient faith really more near to true science or to active life? To science, that which cannot be reduced to law is that which cannot be known, and the unknowable is a thing of naught. Activity on earth can be regulated only by a real not a fictitious, a natural not a supernatural standard. By their very terms, then, the various forms of spiritualism shut themselves off from the world of knowledge and the world of action; and, more or less distinctly, they assume an attitude of antagonism to both.

And yet, on the other hand, is there any better prospect of harmony in the ignoring of religion altogether? The men of science and of action from time to time form desperate hopes for the triumph of their own ideas and the ultimate extinction of religious sentiment. With them it is a morbid growth of the human mind—a weakness bred of ignorance or inaction. They chafe under the grossness of an age which will not be content with the pure love of truth or with the fruits of material success. Yet to how shallow and slight a hope do they trust! Human nature under the influence of its deepest sentiments—veneration, adoration, and devotion—rises up from time to time, and snaps their thin webs like tow. Errors a thousand times refuted spring up again with new life. The instinct of religious feeling is paramount as well as indestructible, and philosophy and politics are in turn confounded by its force. It is an internecine struggle, in which they seem fated eternally to contend, but in which neither can crush its opponent.

In political matters is there any foundation more sure? Constitutions, suffrages, and governments are alike discredited. Some cry for one reform, some for another; but where is the prospect of agreement? The best institutions of the age men cling to at most as stop-gaps, as the practical solution of a shifting problem. But useful as they may be, who believes in them as things of the future, destined to guide

man's course as a social being? What a chaos of plans, nostrums, and watch-cries?—how little trust, or hope, or rest!

In things social is the prospect brighter? Is the question of rich and poor, of labor and capital, of health and industry, of personal freedom and public well-being, so much nearer to its answer than it was? With our great cities decimated by disease, famine, pauperism—with the war of master and servant growing louder and deeper—the corruption of industry increasing—and the whole world of commerce and manufactures swept from time to time by hurricanes of ruin and fraud,—is it a time to indulge in visions of content? We all have hope, it is true, in the force of civilization, in the noble elements of progress, and in the destiny of the human race; but by what path or course they may arrive at the goal, what man shall say?

In such a state of things Positivism comes forward with its system of ideas, which, at the least, is comprehensive as well as uniform. To some its solution may appear premature, to some incomplete, to others erroneous. But what thoughtful mind, among those to whom the social and religious forms of the past are no longer a living thing, can honestly assert that no such problem as it attempts to solve exists at all, or that this problem is already solved?