

LECTURE V.

POSITIVISM.

I.

POSITIVISM is to be the subject of the present lecture. It is a doctrine which is closely related both in history and character to scepticism on the one hand, and to materialism on the other. It owes its existence to the partly concurrent and partly counteractive operation of these two theories. It is a link between them; a cross or hybrid in which their respective qualities are combined, although incapable of being truly harmonised.

The term positivism has been objected to both on philological and logical grounds, but any faults it may have are not of a seriously dangerous kind, and it is my wish to avoid all controversies merely or mainly verbal. It was not, perhaps, a term greatly needed, and it may not be the best which could have been devised; but now that it has

been invented and so widely accepted and employed, it cannot be got rid of, and we must be content simply to guard against its being applied in ways calculated to create or foster prejudice. It was put in circulation by M. Auguste Comte, a man of remarkable intellectual power, but also of immoderate intellectual self-conceit and arrogance. He was born in 1798, and died in 1857. There is an able biography of him by the late M. Littré; and there are a multitude of sketches of his life, executed with different degrees of care and skill. His voluminous writings have been translated into our language by a few of his English disciples with self-denying zeal, and in a manner which leaves nothing to be desired.

M. Comte has no valid claim to be considered the originator of the theory to which he gave a new name and a vigorous impulse. It was taught in all its essential principles by Protagoras and others in Greece more than four hundred years before the Christian era. Positivism is the phenomenalism of the Greek sophists revived and adapted to the demands of the present age. Hume and Kant and Saint Simon were positivists before the appearance of positivism. It is scarcely possible to find in Comte's writings an original view—except on the subject of scientific method—which is generally accepted by

those who are called his disciples. He formed, indeed, a great many original notions,—notions his own by right of paternity or creation,—but these children of his brain few even of his warm admirers have felt inclined to adopt. They are the mere vagaries of an individual mind, and must be left out of account by those who are judging of the general doctrine of positivism. But although all the chief ideas of Comte had been clearly and repeatedly enunciated by earlier thinkers, he had great strength and skill in systematising doctrines and elaborately applying principles, and his influence has been both extensive and intense.

The Positivism which he taught, taken as a whole, is at once a philosophy, a polity, and a religion. It professes to systematise all scientific knowledge, to organise all industrial and social activities, and to satisfy all spiritual aspirations and affections. It undertakes to explain the past, to exhibit the good and evil, strength and weakness, of the present, and to forecast the future; to assign to every science, every large scientific generalisation, every principle and function of human nature, and every great social force, its appropriate place; to construct a system of thought inclusive of all well-established truths, and to delineate a scheme of political and religious life in which

duty and happiness, order and progress, opinion and emotion, will be reconciled and caused to work together for the good alike of the individual and of society. It sets before itself, in a word, an aim of the very largest and grandest kind conceivable; and as Comte believed that he had been signally successful in performing his mighty task, we need hardly wonder that he should have boldly claimed to have rendered to his race the services both of a St Paul and an Aristotle.

Is the system as consistent as it is undoubtedly comprehensive? Comtists themselves cannot agree as to the answer which ought to be given to this question. A few of the more enthusiastic and thoroughgoing among them—such as Dr Bridges, Mr Congreve, and, in a lesser degree, perhaps, Mr Harrison—reply in the affirmative, and accept the system as a whole. A much larger number answer in the negative, and will have nothing to do with the positivist religion. I have no wish to take part in this controversy, which is of no very great importance, and in regard to which, besides, I have elsewhere stated the conclusion at which I have arrived. As, however, the philosophy and religion of Comte are both anti-theistic, and yet, in my opinion, inconsistent with each other, I must consider them

separately,—the one in so far as it would simply push theism aside, and the other in so far as it would provide a substitute for it.

What, then, is the attitude of the positive philosophy towards religion? As represented by Comte, it may be thus described. We know, and can know, nothing except physical phenomena and their laws. The senses are the sources of all true thinking, and we can know nothing except the phenomena which they apprehend, and the relations of sequence and resemblance in which these phenomena stand to one another. Mental phenomena can all be resolved into material phenomena, and there is no such thing discoverable as either efficient or final causation, as either an origin or purpose in the world, as, consequently, either a creative or providential intelligence. The mind in its progress necessarily finds out that phenomena cannot be reasonably referred to supernatural agents, as at a later period that they cannot be referred to occult causes, but that they must be accepted as they present themselves to the senses, and arranged according to their relationships of sequence or coexistence, similarity or dissimilarity. Wherever theological speculation is found, there thought is in its infancy.

Now, the first remark which this suggests is, that it is not consistent even as a theory of positivism. It is to a considerable extent a mate-

rialistic theory, and so far as it is materialism it is not properly positivism. Materialism supposes matter to be more than a phenomenon. It supposes it to be a substance and a cause. The positivist may answer that such phenomena as feelings and thoughts are not resolved into material substances or causes, but into material phenomena. The self-contradiction, however, is not thus to be got rid of. If we know merely phenomena, we never can be warranted to say that those which we call mental can be resolved into those which we call physical. We can only be warranted in saying that the two classes of phenomena are related as coexistent or successive, similar or dissimilar. Comte went far beyond this, and therefore far beyond a self-consistent positivism—*i.e.*, phenomenalism.

Further, the limitation or reduction of phenomena to material phenomena is unwarranted. We have a direct and immediate knowledge of thinking, feeling, and willing, and simply as phenomena these are markedly distinct from the phenomena called material. They are never, as material phenomena always are, the objects of our senses. But we are at least as sure of their existence as of the existence of material phenomena, and to deny or overlook their existence is to reject or ignore that which is most indubitable. There is no testimony so strong as the direct immediate testi-

mony of consciousness. When we feel or think or will, when we perceive or remember, love or hate, we know that we do so with a certainty the most absolute. The consciousness which a man has of any state of mind at the moment when he experiences it, is not sufficient to inform him whether the state be simple or complex, original or derivative—whether it be coextensive with human consciousness or extend into the consciousness of the lower animals, or be peculiar to the consciousness of a portion of the human race or to the individual himself; nor is it sufficient to establish whether there be anything outwardly corresponding to it, but it is sufficient to establish beyond all doubt that there is such a fact in the mental experience of the individual. The most thorough scepticism cannot challenge its evidence when limited to this sphere. It is only, in fact, at this barrier that absolute scepticism is arrested. Absolute scepticism refuses to admit that in external or sense perception things appear to us as they actually—*i.e.*, in themselves—are, but not that internal or self consciousness apprehends its objects as they really exist. In external perception what apprehends is mind, and what is apprehended belongs to an altogether different world, which may or may not correspond to it; whereas in internal perception the object itself falls within the consciousness, exists only as

it is known and is known only as it exists, consciousness and existence being here coincident, and in fact identical. Internal consciousness thus carries with it stronger evidence than sense. The so-called positivism, therefore, which affirms that the objects of sense are the only phenomena apprehended, instead of keeping close to facts, as it pretends to do, contradicts the facts which the experience of every moment of conscious existence testifies to in the most direct and decisive manner. Its most obvious characteristic is the disregard of facts. A number of the adherents of positivism have, consequently, left the company of Comte at this point. They have insisted, very properly, that mental states are positive facts, and the appropriate data of science no less than physical processes.¹

The attempt to defend Comte's position by maintaining that the phenomena of thought, feeling, and volition are not denied, but only referred to the bodily organisation, and thereby included among material phenomena, fails in two respects. In the first place, it cannot justify what it maintains. Mental states may have physical conditions and antecedents, but no mental state has ever been resolved into what is physical. In the second place, if consciousness could be fully explained by organisation, that would prove the truth of mate-

¹ See Appendix XX.

rialism, which, as I have already said, is inconsistent with positivism. When positivism says more than that the phenomena called mental are so and so related to the phenomena called material—when it says that the former can be referred to or resolved into the latter, so as to be really material phenomena,—it supposes to be true what it professes to deny—viz., the reality of causes and substances; it supposes that matter is not an aggregate of phenomena, but a substance or cause, or both.

This leads me to remark that positivism is not thorough. It goes only so far as is convenient for it, not so far as it logically ought. Comte assumes material phenomena to be the primary and ultimate known existences,—those from which science must start, and on which it must rest. But the least reflection shows us that the assumption is wholly groundless. The first thing which scepticism has swallowed up has always been the world of sense—these material phenomena. It has always found that if the senses are our sole means of knowing, the sole things known must be sensations, and sensations are states of consciousness—phenomena of mind, not of matter. If we know only phenomena, it is not material phenomena we know, but mental phenomena. What we call material phenomena are in that case mere illusions. The materialistic positivism of Comte

is bound to abdicate in favour of the idealistic positivism of Mill, which confines all our knowledge to mental phenomena.

This brings us decidedly farther on the way to the goal which, *nolens volens*, positivism must arrive at—viz., scepticism. It is not belief in God only which it must discard, but belief in matter also; and not belief merely in matter in some special philosophical sense, not belief merely in some material essence or substance distinct from phenomena, but in material phenomena themselves. If we know only phenomena, we know only mental phenomena; the whole universe is on that supposition an aggregate of states of mind, and when we think of time or space, sea or sky, as without us we are self-deluded; there is and can be no knowledge of what is without. Mr Mill, it is true, tries to preserve something, and to show that we may be philosophers and yet believe in a sort of "outer" or material world. We may believe in it, he thinks, as "a permanent possibility of sensations." But no. A possibility is not a phenomenon. If we know only what is phenomenal, we cannot know what is possible as distinct from and explanatory of the phenomenal. Nor can a mere experience of phenomena inform us that any of them will be permanent, since experience is necessarily limited to the actual, to what is and to what has been. Indeed the phrase "a permanent pos-

sibility of sensation" is unintelligible. It must have been meant either for "a permanent possibility of producing sensations" or "a permanent possibility of experiencing sensations." But matter is certainly no possibility of experiencing sensations. That matter is sentient is a groundless fancy, not a positive fact, although in the course of the ages a few thinkers and dreamers have entertained the notion. And matter cannot be a possibility of producing sensations in the view of a consistent positivism which refuses to recognise causation, efficiency. A consistent positivism must be a purely idealistic positivism. Even the dim ghost of matter which Mr Mill would retain must be discarded.

And it will not suffice. Mind must likewise go. Mind cannot be identified with its phenomena. If we know only phenomena we know only a series of states of consciousness. We can, on that supposition, have no right to say, as Mr Mill does, that a mind is "a thread of consciousness." It can only be a general term for a succession of states of consciousness unconnected by any thread. We can have no right, if positivism be true, to use language like this: "As body is the mysterious something which excites the mind to feel, so mind is the mysterious something which feels and thinks." It is not the language of positivism to point us to mysterious somethings. On the contrary, as long

as it has any regard for consistency, it will warn us to have nothing to do with "mysterious somethings," but to keep close to experienced phenomena. Positivism must give up, then, both matter and mind. What remains? Phenomena—but these reduced to states of consciousness which have neither object nor subject,—states of consciousness which seem to be, but are not, what they seem,—states of consciousness of a kind which consciousness is unconscious of, and which thought cannot conceive. It is to this bourn that positivism must inevitably come. Reason can only lead it to annihilation.

Comte lays his interdict on all speculation as to the origin of the world. He condemns both theism and atheism, both the affirmation and the denial of the existence of God. Belief and disbelief are, he thinks, in this case alike unreasonable. The mind should absolutely refuse either to believe or disbelieve on such a subject. Now this is an obviously absurd view, an obviously most erroneous advice, except on two suppositions—namely, that there is no reason whatever in favour either of theism or atheism, or that the reasons for the one exactly counterbalance those for the other. We have no right to withhold belief where there is reason for belief, nor to believe otherwise than according to reason. But all forms of theoretical atheism give some reasons for their claims to be

received, and theism maintains that it has an overwhelming weight of reason on its side. In these circumstances, no man is entitled to withhold any more than to yield belief as he pleases. No man is entitled to evade the responsibility of carefully considering what is to be believed and disbelieved on the greatest subject with which human thought can be occupied, by the arbitrary and unreasoned assertion that belief and disbelief in reference to it are both unwarranted. No man has a right to make such an assertion without trying to prove it. It is an assertion which needs proof as much as any theory of the origin of the world.

It is an assertion which does not appear, at least at the first glance, as if it would be easy of proof. For what does its proof imply? Manifestly both the disproof of all the theories which have been entertained as to the origin of things—theism, pantheism, polytheism, and even materialism—and proof that all theories which may in future be started on the same subject must be equally in vain. The latter task, as I showed in my first lecture, must transcend human power. The human mind of to-day cannot know what will be discovered by the human mind a hundred, a thousand, a million years hence. Only an infinite mind can foreknow what a finite mind will know throughout eternity. It is absurd for a philosophy

which professes to confine itself to experience to dogmatise on what man may or may not possibly know. He who would prove that God cannot be known, must prove that there is something essentially self-contradictory in the very notion of the Divine existence and nature. But that cannot be proved by experience ; it can only be proved, if it can be proved at all, by the self-criticism of reason, by the metaphysical process which positivism pronounces worthless.

A simple refutation of the proofs adduced on behalf of the various forms of religion must be admitted to be a more hopeful undertaking, but even it is not one in which positivism has succeeded. It has brought nothing new to light against pantheism. It has favoured materialism instead of overcoming and expelling it. Its arguments against theism have consisted to a large extent of ancient and superficial fallacies, the weight of which are as nothing compared with the reasons in the opposite scale. Before casting aside a belief like that in God—a belief entertained by a long succession of generations, by millions of men, by the noblest intellects which the world has ever known—a belief the most fruitful in great thoughts and great deeds—a belief which could not be displaced without shaking society from top to base,—the examination of its foundations ought to be impartial and profound ; but

positivism has undertaken no examination of the kind.

The only argument with any claim to be regarded as original or distinctive which positivism has employed against theism, is that which some of its supporters rest on the so-called *law of the three states*. Comte, as every one knows who knows anything regarding his views, holds that speculation is first theological, then metaphysical, and finally positive; or, in other words, is first a reference of phenomena to supernatural volitions, then to occult causes, and finally the mere arranging of them according to their relations of sequence and coexistence, likeness or unlikeness. He believed that he had established that the progressive march of human thought was from the first to the last of these states, and that when the last was reached, those which preceded it were left behind; that when positive science was attained, theological and metaphysical speculation were necessarily seen to be illegitimate and worthless. Some, however, who have imagined that they adopted his law—the late Mr J. S. Mill and Mr J. Morley, for example—would ignore its negative bearing, at least towards theology, and suppose it to mean merely that in the positive epoch all phenomena, physical and social, will be looked upon as following a fixed order, although that order may have been ordained by God. With positivists of this class I need here

have no controversy. I am only surprised that they should be able to suppose that they accept Comte's law as proposed by himself. If he had seen that positivist thought was not exclusive of theological thought; that when you had reached a law of phenomenon, so far from having done with all questions as to whether or not these phenomena have any relation to God, you were only brought into a position to ask, Is this law not an ordinance of God?—is it not an expression of His will?—I should have had nothing to object to him. But had he seen that, he would have seen also that his positivism was a comparatively small and partial thing, however true it might be within the narrow limits in that case assigned to it. Certainly, as a matter of fact, he did not see it. He clearly and explicitly taught the contrary. He distinctly held that positivism so excludes metaphysics and theology, that positivism completed would be metaphysics and theology eliminated from the entire intelligible world.

For this dogma, however, he produced no historical evidence. There was, in fact, none to produce. The scientific proof of law has in no single instance been found to include or involve disproof of a lawgiver. In no nation, and with respect to no single science or even single scientific truth, has the human mind yet reached a position which is beyond or above theism, or from which theism

can be seen to be untrue; so that Comte's law, as propounded by himself, is in its negative reference, in which alone it concerns us here, wholly unwarranted by facts. Comte has mistaken, as I have previously had occasion to prove, in a work on the 'Philosophy of History in France and Germany,' three coexistent states for three successive stages of thought, three aspects of things for three epochs of time. Theology, metaphysics, and positive science, instead of following only after one another, each constituting an epoch, have each pervaded all epochs—have coexisted from the earliest times to the present day. There has been no passing away of any one of them. Each new positive science brings with it principles which the metaphysician finds it requisite to submit to an analytic examination, and in which he finds new materials for speculation; and also, in the measure of its success, results in which the theologian finds some fresh disclosure of the thoughts and character of God. Underneath all positive or empirical science there is metaphysics; above all such science there is theology; and these three are so related that every advance of science must extend the spheres both of true metaphysics and true theology. Hence history, far from showing that theology and metaphysics are purely of her domain, merely passing phases of thought preparatory for positive science. illusions of the

infancy and youth of humanity through which the mind must pass on its way to maturity, certifies, on the contrary, that all three have constantly existed together,—that while each has been gradually emancipating itself from the interference and control of the others, each has been advancing and evolving within its proper sphere and in due relationship to the others; that they are distinguishable but not divisible; that they represent real aspects of existence and respond to eternal aspirations of the human heart. I do not dwell, however, on this, because I have elsewhere done so. Suffice it to say that the appeal of the positivist to history for a testimony unfavourable to theism, evokes only a declaration on its behalf.¹

Let us consider for a moment the positivist appeal to reason. Under this head Comte's fundamental objection to theism and theology is, that they imply that man can attain to a knowledge of causes, whereas causes are, he holds, absolutely inaccessible to the human intellect. He admits that a religious theory of the world, a belief in a divine Author of the world, is inevitable, if reason can rise to causes, but he denies that it can. To deny, however, is always easy; to prove a negative is always difficult. In order to prove the negative in question, M. Comte must have proved that he

¹ See Appendix XXI.

himself was not a cause ; that it could not be fairly concluded that he was the efficient and intelligent author of the books which he took credit to himself for having written ; that the apparent evidences of mind in these works were deceptive, and did not warrant the reference of them to mind as their cause. The only reasons which he advanced against the theistic conclusion should have led him straight to suspense of judgment respecting the causation involved in the production of his own works. They were as good grounds for declaring illusory the evidence for his own existence as for disregarding the evidence for God's existence, although, of course, extremely insufficient grounds for doing either the one or the other. If from the combination of letters in a book we can legitimately rise to the mind of the author as at least one of the causes of its existence, a knowledge of causes, in the only sense in which a theist is interested in maintaining that they can be known, is clearly not inaccessible to the human intellect, but within its easy reach. If, on the other hand, positivists are justified in asserting that causes are absolutely unknowable, let them not expect us to believe that they themselves are the authors of books and speeches ; that their invisible thoughts and volitions have originated printed and audible words. If a human mind can reveal itself as in a certain sense a cause through paper and printer's

ink, it is utterly arbitrary to deny that the Divine mind may reveal itself as in the same sense a cause through the arrangements and forms of the material universe.

All the reasonings of positivists against causes resolve themselves at last into the single argument—We cannot *see* causality, and therefore we cannot *know* causes; our senses show us succession but not causation, antecedents and consequents but not causes and effects; and we know nothing, and have no right to believe anything, beyond what our senses show us. In other words, their entire argumentation proceeds on a superficial hypothesis as to the nature of knowledge—one which fails to note that the mind itself is the most important factor in knowledge, and that the simplest and directest experience presupposes a constitution in thought as well as in things. Causes are inferred to be metaphysical fictions because sensation is assumed to be the sole means of knowledge, the only true ground of belief, and the complete measure of existence. But these assumptions are crude and unfounded dogmas. To those who believe that there is no such state as mere sensation—that thought and belief must always go beyond sensation—that the idea of cause is a necessary condition of intellectual activity—and that phenomena can only be apprehended and conceived of by the help of this idea,—the reasoning of the

positivist must seem a manifest begging of the question.

When treating last year of the design argument, I examined all the objections of Comte against final causes which seemed to me possessed of any plausibility. On this point, therefore, I shall merely remark now, that if, as he maintained, we can know nothing of final causes, nothing of the purposes which things are meant to accomplish, the arguments by which he attempted to show that they might have realised their final causes, fulfilled their purposes, better than they do, ought in self-consistency never to have been used. If we can have no notion of the purpose of a thing, we cannot judge whether it is fulfilling its purpose or not, whether it is fulfilling it well or ill. Comte's unqualified denial of the possibility of knowing the ends of things is glaringly inconsistent with his attempts to prove that things might have been constituted and arranged in a happier and more advantageous manner. For a man who avows complete ignorance of the purposes of things to try to show that they are not fulfilling their purposes, or might fulfil them more successfully, is the most suicidal, self-contradictory undertaking imaginable. It shows that he himself finds it impossible really to believe what he rashly affirms. It shows that in spite of his theory the belief in final causes is so rooted in his intellectual

nature that he assumes it even when reasoning against it.

II.

Were positivism established as a philosophy, no room would be left for religion in the ordinary sense of the term. If the mind can know nothing except the phenomena of immediate experience, if sensations and feelings be the matter of all its thoughts, if God be wholly beyond its cognisance, it is inevitably condemned to confine its beliefs, anticipations, fears, and joys, to this visible and temporal scene of things. This being the case, how can there be any religion? Till comparatively late in his career, Comte did not suppose there could be any, and did not feel the want of any. He considered "religiosity," as he called it, "a mere weakness, and avowal of want of power." But in the latter part of his life he passed through certain experiences which convinced him that the heart was as essential a part of humanity as the head; that the spirit required to be satisfied as well as the intellect. He felt in himself wants which mere science could not supply, and recognised, in consequence, that the human race could not dispense with a religion. With characteristic boldness he proceeded to invent what he was pleased to designate a religion. This so-called

religion has not as yet obtained many adherents, and does not appear as if it would be more successful in the future, although its founder felt no doubt that it would speedily supersede all former faiths. Few of those who are positivists in philosophy are also positivists in religion. As a rule, positivists have no religion. And in this, I think, they are quite consistent.

M. Comte laid the basis of his proposed religious reformation in a radical alteration of the signification of the word religion. Religion had been previously always understood to imply belief in a God—to rest on some affirmation of the supernatural. M. Comte wished to present as a religion a theory of life which involved no belief in a God—no affirmation of the supernatural. He gained his end simply enough by employing the word religion in a peculiar sense. But, of course, there was and could be no justification of this procedure. The human race has rights in such a term as religion which are not to be sacrificed to the will of any individual. The business of a thinker dealing with this and similar words is, to ascertain what they have hitherto meant and what they actually mean, and to apply them as other men have done and do; for him to impose a signification of his own upon them is alike an arbitrary and an arrogant act, and one which tends to generate confusion and error. A religion which is

independent of a belief in a God is a conception of the same kind as a circle whose radii are not all equal. Belief in a God is of the very essence of all that men have been accustomed to call religion, and whatever is not inclusive of this belief ought to be expressed by some other term than religion.

What, however, is religion, according to M. Comte? It is, he says, "the synthetic idealisation of our existence," or "that state of perfect unity which is the distinctive mark of man's existence, both as an individual and in society, when all the constituent parts of his nature, moral as well as physical, are made habitually to converge towards one common unity." Mr J. S. Mill accepted M. Comte's view on this subject, and gave it expression in clear and simple terms. These are the conditions necessary to constitute a religion in the positivist sense of the word, as stated by Mr Mill: "There must be a creed or conviction claiming authority over the whole of human life; a belief, or set of beliefs, deliberately adopted, respecting human destiny and duty, to which the believer inwardly acknowledges that all his actions ought to be subordinate. Moreover, there must be a sentiment connected with this creed, or capable of being invoked by it, sufficiently powerful to give it, in fact, the authority over human conduct to which it lays claim in theory." According to this doctrine, "if a person has an ideal object, his attach-

ment and sense of duty towards which are able to control and discipline all his other sentiments and propensities, and prescribe to him a rule of life, that person has a religion."

Such is the account of religion given by M. Comte and Mr Mill. What are we to think of it? Well, it could scarcely be more inaccurate than it is. Were we not told that it was meant for an account of religion, we should certainly never have imagined anything of the kind, and, even after being told this, it is somewhat difficult to believe it. The distinguished authors of the description have succeeded about as well as would a painter who, designing to represent a man, should draw the likeness of a horse or some other animal. They have given a sort of picture not of religion at all, but of morality, and have consequently done what they could inextricably to confound religion and morality. Conscience, as the supreme legislative principle in man, is necessarily the power which is in possession of the synthetic ideal of life. Its dictates constitute the law of unity to which all the parts and faculties of human nature should habitually converge. It essentially consists of "a creed or conviction claiming authority over the whole of human life, and a sentiment connected with this creed, or capable of being invoked by it, giving it the authority over human conduct to which it lays claim in theory." When language

is used with propriety, "if a person has an ideal object, his attachment and sense of duty towards which are able to control and discipline all his other sentiments and propensities, and prescribe to him a rule of life," what that person will be said to have is a good moral character. Thus the Comtist account of religion corresponds in some measure to morality. But it has scarcely the most distant resemblance to religion. Test it by application to any of the heathen religions, with the exception of Buddhism, and its inaccuracy will be seen at once; while Buddhism only answers to it so far in consequence of being a system of philosophy and a code of ethics as well as a religion. Religion is not essentially synthetic. It does not necessarily tend to unity, and still less is it necessarily a state of perfect unity. In almost all its lower forms, and even in the worships of India and Greece, it may be seen to work towards division and multiplicity. The tendency to unity is only manifested in a religion when the theorising reason obtains the mastery over imagination and phantasy. The mythological processes are the reverse of synthetic or unifying. Nor does religion necessarily and of itself prescribe a universal and comprehensive rule of life. One of the most obtrusive facts presented by the history of religion is, that only in its higher types does religion enter into alliance with morality, and add its

sanction and consecration to a general code of conduct. Religion as religion, may be, and in countless cases is, grievously divorced from the sense of duty. The separation is, of course, to be deplored, but its possibility, and, still more, its frequent actual occurrence, prove that to identify religion with morality is altogether inadmissible. Further, religion does not imply idealisation in the sense meant by Comte and Mill. Imagination, there is no doubt, enters largely into religion, and worshippers always conceive of their gods as in some respects superior to themselves. But idealisation as a conscious formation of types of perfection, or a deliberate imaginative glorification of anything, so as to make it an ideal object in contradistinction to a real object, is not a religious but a purely poetical process. Ideals cannot even be idols.

Yet Comte might have gone still farther from the truth as to the nature of religion than he actually did. The idealisation which he demanded was the idealisation of a reality,—the idealisation of the Great Being or Humanity. It was not the idealisation which is pure fiction—which is wholly irrespective of truth—which has no connection whatever with reality. Comte thus left it possible for a successor to acquire the fame of originality by maintaining that the essence of religion was such pure or absolutely baseless idealisation; and

this, I regret to say, is precisely what has been done by Lange, the author of the 'History of Materialism.' He has followed to the very end the path opened by Comte; and although the end be an abyss, he has cast himself into it. He does not propose, like Strauss, to substitute poetry for religion, but he regards religion as merely a kind of poetry. Man, he holds, has, and can have, no knowledge of anything transcending positive experience, no cognisance of supernatural reality, no apprehension of spiritual truth. At the same time, he also holds that knowledge, experience, and truth, are insufficient to satisfy the wants of human nature. He insists that there are tendencies or instincts in the heart which crave for ideal objects that respond exclusively to the emotions. The spirit, in his view, can only find peace by creating a home for itself in the ideal world. But it must beware of falling into the delusion that the contents of that world are truths. It must regard them merely as means of emotional development and culture. Hymns like "Rock of Ages cleft for me," and "Jesus, lover of my soul," may be retained and devotionally used, provided it be remembered that they are simply poetry—that they have no basis in reality.

The mere statement of such a view is a sufficient refutation of it. What it represents as religion is an idiotic and immoral mimicry of religion. Lange

has given no reasons for entertaining it, and I need give none for rejecting it. I have noticed it merely to show that as to the nature of religion there is even a lower depth than that into which Comte fell. He failed to see that only a religion which is based on the conviction that there is a reality higher than man's highest ideals, can satisfy the intellect and heart; and he fancied, in consequence, that a finite being—a being which can be exalted and magnified by idealisation—was an appropriate object of adoration. But great as was this error, it was, of course, far less monstrous than to teach that religion was wholly independent of belief in truth or reality, and that men ought only to worship in the future what they know to be the fictions of their own minds.

The positivist religion presents to us as an object of worship a trinity of existences—the earth, space, and humanity. The earth is called the Supreme Fetich, space the Supreme Medium and humanity the Supreme Being. The positivist is instructed duly to commemorate the services of our common mother, the earth, and of her coeval institution, space; but humanity is to be the chief object of his worship. True piety consists in having the thoughts, affections, and volitions ever bent on the preservation and amelioration of humanity. This humanity is by no means, however, what is ordinarily called humanity. It is something very

peculiar indeed. It is neither human nature, nor the human race, nor the aggregate of living men. It is said to be an organism of which individuals and generations, whether belonging to the past, present, or future, are inseparable parts, and yet it excludes multitudes of the human species, and includes some of the lower animals. It does not comprehend savage and unprogressive peoples, or individuals without any particular merits. It consists for the most part of the dead and the unborn. The majority of the living are only its servants, without the power at present of becoming its organs. It is only seven years after they are dead, and on condition of their being found worthy of "subjective immortality," that they are to be "incorporated in the Supreme Being." The incorporation is to be effected by the vote of the positivist community. As the positivist believes in the annihilation of all the dead, and as the future generations are not yet in existence, his Supreme Being is obviously a being which is largely no being at all, an entity which is for the most part a non-entity. The notion of it is, in fact, so self-contradictory, that it can only be expressed in language which seems intended to caricature it.

That this should be the case is all the more remarkable, because Comte was fully aware how incumbent upon him it was accurately to deter-

mine what was to be meant by humanity. He knew and acknowledged that a clear and consistent conception of the signification of the term was to his theory of religion as indispensable as is a solid and well-laid foundation-stone to a building; that to attain and exhibit such a conception was his first duty in connection with the new faith which he desired to propagate; and that if he failed in this part of his self-imposed task, his failure as a rival of St Paul must be fatal and total. Impressed with these convictions, he could not, as a conscientious thinker, do otherwise than bestow much labour in attempting to ascertain and explain the nature of the humanity which he represented as an object of worship. His failure certainly cannot be attributed to his having shrunk from the requisite exertion. He toiled long and hard on the subject. Still fail he did, and most signally. The notion of humanity as he has presented it in the 'Positive Polity,' although the very corner-stone of his religion, is so self-contradictory and incoherent, that it can only be expressed in Hibernicisms. It is composed of concrete and abstract, positive and metaphysical elements, of facts and fictions, of entity and non-entity. An obvious inference is, that Comte cannot have founded the religion of humanity.

While the object of the positivist faith is extremely ill defined, its organisation and worship

are most minutely delineated. This is the consequence, however, not of internal self-consistency and reasonableness, but of imitation of Roman Catholicism. While Comte abandoned the great and comprehensive principles which the Roman Catholic Church holds in common with the rest of the Christian world, he retained many of the distinctive prejudices which it sanctions and engenders, and copied its policy and ritual in describing the constitution and prescribing the worship of what he believed would be the religion of the future. He demanded that there should be set apart to the service of humanity an order of priests or *savants*, composed of positivist philosophers, hierarchically arranged, with a supreme pontiff at their head, to whom absolute powers are to be intrusted in intellectual or spiritual matters. This priesthood is to be salaried by the State; is to have the entire charge of public education and of the practice of medicine; and is to counsel, and, if need be, reprove the temporal power. The high priest must reside in Paris, the holy city of the new religion. There are to be ecclesiastical courts and laws. The temples should all face towards Paris, and are to be furnished with altars, images, &c. The dress of the clergy is to be rather more feminine than masculine. Eighty-one solemn festivals, secondary or principal, are to constitute the worship annually paid

to the Great Being by its servants assembled in its temples. Each step in life is to have its special consecration, and hence the sacraments of the new religion are to be nine in number,—presentation, initiation, admission, destination, marriage, maturity, retreat, transformation, and incorporation. Private prayers are to be presented thrice a-day; the morning prayer is to be an hour, the mid-day prayer a quarter of an hour, and the evening prayer half an hour in length. What is called “the beautiful creation of the medieval mind—the woman with the child in her arms,” is selected as the symbol of humanity; and “to give life and vividness to this symbol, and to worship in general, each positivist is taught to adopt as objects of his adoration his mother, his wife, his daughter, allowing the principal part to the mother, but blending the three into one compound influence—representing to him humanity in its past, its present, and its future.

I must not more minutely describe the monstrous mixture of atheism, fetichism, ultramontanism, and ritualism, which claims to be the Religion of Humanity, so absurd and grotesque is it. Almost its only noble characteristic is the spirit of disinterestedness which it breathes, the stress which it lays on the duty of living for the good of others. In this respect it has imitated, although *longo*

intervallo, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But unlike the Gospel, although it enjoins love to one another with the urgency which is due, it unseals no fresh source and brings to light no new motives of love. A mere doctrinal inculcation of the duty of active and affectionate beneficence, under the barbarous name of altruism, is its highest service as a system of religion, what it has added thereto being worse than useless, because tending to render even "the royal law" of love itself ridiculous.¹

Is it not instructive that Comte should have been unable to devise anything better than the so-called religion of which I have been speaking, and that neither he nor any other person who has attempted to raise a substitute for Christianity on the basis of science has failed signally to display his own feebleness and folly? The character of the religions which have been invented in the present age is no slight indirect confirmation of the divine origin of the religion which they would displace. If all that men can do in the way of religious invention, even in the nineteenth century, and with every help which science can give them, is like what we have seen them doing, the religion which has come down to us through so many centuries can have been no human invention. It could not have been originated by science; and were it

¹ See Appendix XXII.

withdrawn, science would assuredly find no substitute for it. Take it away and we should be left even at this hour in absolute spiritual darkness and helplessness. That is the truth which all modern attempts to found and form new religions concur in establishing.