

# **Auguste Comte and Positivism eBook**

## **Auguste Comte and Positivism by John Stuart Mill**

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## PART II.

### THE LATER SPECULATIONS OF M. COMTE.[22]

The appended list of publications contain the materials for knowing and estimating what M. Comte termed his second career, in which the *savant*, historian, and philosopher of his fundamental treatise, came forth transfigured as the High Priest of the Religion of Humanity. They include all his writings except the *Cours de Philosophie Positive*: for his early productions, and the occasional publications of his later life, are reprinted as Preludes or Appendices to the treatises here enumerated, or in Dr Robinet's volume, which, as well as that of M. Littré, also contains copious extracts from his correspondence.

In the concluding pages of his great systematic work, M. Comte had announced four other treatises as in contemplation: on Politics; on the Philosophy of Mathematics; on Education, a project subsequently enlarged to include the systematization of Morals; and on Industry, or the action of man upon external nature. Our list comprises the only two of these which he lived to execute. It further contains a brief exposition of his final doctrines, in the form of a Dialogue, or, as he terms it, a Catechism, of which a translation has been published by his principal English adherent, Mr Congreve. There has also appeared very recently, under the title of "A General View of Positivism," a translation by Dr Bridges, of the Preliminary Discourse in six chapters, prefixed to the *Systeme de Politique Positive*. The remaining three books on our list are the productions of disciples in different degrees. M. Littré, the only thinker of established reputation who accepts that character, is a disciple only of the *Cours de Philosophie Positive*, and can see the weak points even in that. Some of them he has discriminated and discussed with great judgment: and the merits of his volume, both as a sketch of M. Comte's life and an appreciation of his doctrines, would well deserve a fuller notice than we are able to give it here. M. de Blignières is a far more thorough adherent; so much so, that the reader of his singularly well and attractively written condensation and popularization of his master's doctrines, does not easily discover in what it falls short of that unqualified acceptance which alone, it would seem, could find favour with M. Comte. For he ended by casting off M. de Blignières, as he had previously cast off M. Littré, and every other person who, having gone with him a certain length, refused to follow him to the end. The author of the last work in our enumeration, Dr Robinet, is a disciple after M. Comte's own heart; one whom no difficulty stops, and no absurdity startles. But it is far from our disposition to speak otherwise than respectfully of Dr Robinet and the other earnest men, who maintain round the tomb of their master an organized co-operation for the diffusion of doctrines which they believe destined to regenerate the human race. Their enthusiastic veneration for him, and devotion to the ends he pursued, do honour alike to them and to their teacher, and are an evidence of the personal ascendancy he exercised over those who approached him; an ascendancy

which for a time carried away even M. Littré, as he confesses, to a length which his calmer judgment does not now approve.



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These various writings raise many points of interest regarding M. Comte's personal history, and some, not without philosophic bearings, respecting his mental habits: from all which matters we shall abstain, with the exception of two, which he himself proclaimed with great emphasis, and a knowledge of which is almost indispensable to an apprehension of the characteristic difference between his second career and his first. It should be known that during his later life, and even before completing his first great treatise, M. Comte adopted a rule, to which he very rarely made any exception: to abstain systematically, not only from newspapers or periodical publications, even scientific, but from all reading whatever, except a few favourite poets in the ancient and modern European languages. This abstinence he practised for the sake of mental health; by way, as he said, of "*hygiene cerebrale*." We are far from thinking that the practice has nothing whatever to recommend it. For most thinkers, doubtless, it would be a very unwise one; but we will not affirm that it may not sometimes be advantageous to a mind of the peculiar quality of M. Comte's—one that can usefully devote itself to following out to the remotest developments a particular line of meditations, of so arduous a kind that the complete concentration of the intellect upon its own thoughts is almost a necessary condition of success. When a mind of this character has laboriously and conscientiously laid in beforehand, as M. Comte had done, an ample stock of materials, he may be justified in thinking that he will contribute most to the mental wealth of mankind by occupying himself solely in working upon these, without distracting his attention by continually taking in more matter, or keeping a communication open with other independent intellects. The practice, therefore, may be legitimate; but no one should adopt it without being aware of what he loses by it. He must resign the pretension of arriving at the whole truth on the subject, whatever it be, of his meditations. That he should effect this, even on a narrow subject, by the mere force of his own mind, building on the foundations of his predecessors, without aid or correction from his contemporaries, is simply impossible. He may do eminent service by elaborating certain sides of the truth, but he must expect to find that there are other sides which have wholly escaped his attention. However great his powers, everything that he can do without the aid of incessant reminders from other thinkers, is merely provisional, and will require a thorough revision. He ought to be aware of this, and accept it with his eyes open, regarding himself as a pioneer, not a constructor. If he thinks that he can contribute most towards the elements of the final synthesis by following out his own original thoughts as far as they will go, leaving to other thinkers, or to himself at a subsequent time, the business of adjusting them to the thoughts by which they ought to be accompanied, he is right in doing so. But he deludes himself if he imagines that any conclusions he can arrive at, while he practises M. Comte's rule of *hygiene cerebrale*, can possibly be definitive.



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Neither is such a practice, in a hygienic point of view, free from the gravest dangers to the philosopher's own mind. When once he has persuaded himself that he can work out the final truth on any subject, exclusively from his own sources, he is apt to lose all measure or standard by which to be apprized when he is departing from common sense. Living only with his own thoughts, he gradually forgets the aspect they present to minds of a different mould from his own; he looks at his conclusions only from the point of view which suggested them, and from which they naturally appear perfect; and every consideration which from other points of view might present itself, either as an objection or as a necessary modification, is to him as if it did not exist. When his merits come to be recognised and appreciated, and especially if he obtains disciples, the intellectual infirmity soon becomes complicated with a moral one. The natural result of the position is a gigantic self-confidence, not to say self-conceit. That of M. Comte is colossal. Except here and there in an entirely self-taught thinker, who has no high standard with which to compare himself, we have met with nothing approaching to it. As his thoughts grew more extravagant, his self-confidence grew more outrageous. The height it ultimately attained must be seen, in his writings, to be believed.

The other circumstance of a personal nature which it is impossible not to notice, because M. Comte is perpetually referring to it as the origin of the great superiority which he ascribes to his later as compared with his earlier speculations, is the "moral regeneration" which he underwent from "une angelique influence" and "une incomparable passion privee." He formed a passionate attachment to a lady whom he describes as uniting everything which is morally with much that is intellectually admirable, and his relation to whom, besides the direct influence of her character upon his own, gave him an insight into the true sources of human happiness, which changed his whole conception of life. This attachment, which always remained pure, gave him but one year of passionate enjoyment, the lady having been cut off by death at the end of that short period; but the adoration of her memory survived, and became, as we shall see, the type of his conception of the sympathetic culture proper for all human beings. The change thus effected in his personal character and sentiments, manifested itself at once in his speculations; which, from having been only a philosophy, now aspired to become a religion; and from having been as purely, and almost rudely, scientific and intellectual, as was compatible with a character always enthusiastic in its admirations and in its ardour for improvement, became from this time what, for want of a better name, may be called sentimental; but sentimental in a way of its own, very curious to contemplate. In considering the system of religion, politics, and morals, which

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in his later writings M. Comte constructed, it is not unimportant to bear in mind the nature of the personal experience and inspiration to which he himself constantly attributed this phasis of his philosophy. But as we shall have much more to say against, than in favour of, the conclusions to which he was in this manner conducted, it is right to declare that, from the evidence of his writings, we really believe the moral influence of Madame Clotilde de Vaux upon his character to have been of the ennobling as well as softening character which he ascribes to it. Making allowance for the effects of his exuberant growth in self-conceit, we perceive almost as much improvement in his feelings, as deterioration in his speculations, compared with those of the Philosophie Positive. Even the speculations are, in some secondary aspects, improved through the beneficial effect of the improved feelings; and might have been more so, if, by a rare good fortune, the object of his attachment had been qualified to exercise as improving an influence over him intellectually as morally, and if he could have been contented with something less ambitious than being the supreme moral legislator and religious pontiff of the human race.

When we say that M. Comte has erected his philosophy into a religion, the word religion must not be understood in its ordinary sense. He made no change in the purely negative attitude which he maintained towards theology: his religion is without a God. In saying this, we have done enough to induce nine-tenths of all readers, at least in our own country, to avert their faces and close their ears. To have no religion, though scandalous enough, is an idea they are partly used to: but to have no God, and to talk of religion, is to their feelings at once an absurdity and an impiety. Of the remaining tenth, a great proportion, perhaps, will turn away from anything which calls itself by the name of religion at all. Between the two, it is difficult to find an audience who can be induced to listen to M. Comte without an insurmountable prejudice. But, to be just to any opinion, it ought to be considered, not exclusively from an opponent's point of view, but from that of the mind which propounds it. Though conscious of being in an extremely small minority, we venture to think that a religion may exist without belief in a God, and that a religion without a God may be, even to Christians, an instructive and profitable object of contemplation.

What, in truth, are the conditions necessary to constitute a religion? 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



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conduct to which it lays claim in theory. It is a great advantage (though not absolutely indispensable) that this sentiment should crystallize, as it were, round a concrete object; if possible a really existing one, though, in all the more important cases, only ideally present. Such an object Theism and Christianity offer to the believer: but the condition may be fulfilled, if not in a manner strictly equivalent, by another object. It has been said that whoever believes in "the Infinite nature of Duty," even if he believe in nothing else, is religious. M. Comte believes in what is meant by the infinite nature of duty, but he refers the obligations of duty, as well as all sentiments of devotion, to a concrete object, at once ideal and real; the Human Race, conceived as a continuous whole, including the past, the present, and the future. This great collective existence, this "Grand Etre," as he terms it, though the feelings it can excite are necessarily very different from those which direct themselves towards an ideally perfect Being, has, as he forcibly urges, this advantage in respect to us, that it really needs our services, which Omnipotence cannot, in any genuine sense of the term, be supposed to do: and M. Comte says, that assuming the existence of a Supreme Providence (which he is as far from denying as from affirming), the best, and even the only, way in which we can rightly worship or serve Him, is by doing our utmost to love and serve that other Great Being, whose inferior Providence has bestowed on us all the benefits that we owe to the labours and virtues of former generations. It may not be consonant to usage to call this a religion; but the term so applied has a meaning, and one which is not adequately expressed by any other word. Candid persons of all creeds may be willing to admit, that 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, that person has a religion: and though everyone naturally prefers his own religion to any other, all must admit that if the object of this attachment, and of this feeling of duty, is the aggregate of our fellow-creatures, this Religion of the Infidel cannot, in honesty and conscience, be called an intrinsically bad one. Many, indeed, may be unable to believe that this object is capable of gathering round it feelings sufficiently strong: but this is exactly the point on which a doubt can hardly remain in an intelligent reader of M. Comte: and we join with him in contemning, as equally irrational and mean, the conception of human nature as incapable of giving its love and devoting its existence to any object which cannot afford in exchange an eternity of personal enjoyment.

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The power which may be acquired over the mind by the idea of the general interest of the human race, both as a source of emotion and as a motive to conduct, many have perceived; but we know not if any one, before M. Comte, realized so fully as he has done, all the majesty of which that idea is susceptible. It ascends into the unknown recesses of the past, embraces the manifold present, and descends into the indefinite and unforeseeable future, forming a collective Existence without assignable beginning or end, it appeals to that feeling of the Infinite, which is deeply rooted in human nature, and which seems necessary to the imposingness of all our highest conceptions. Of the vast unrolling web of human life, the part best known to us is irrevocably past; this we can no longer serve, but can still love: it comprises for most of us the far greater number of those who have loved us, or from whom we have received benefits, as well as the long series of those who, by their labours and sacrifices for mankind, have deserved to be held in everlasting and grateful remembrance. As M. Comte truly says, the highest minds, even now, live in thought with the great dead, far more than with the living; and, next to the dead, with those ideal human beings yet to come, whom they are never destined to see. If we honour as we ought those who have served mankind in the past, we shall feel that we are also working for those benefactors by serving that to which their lives were devoted. And when reflection, guided by history, has taught us the intimacy of the connexion of every age of humanity with every other, making us see in the earthly destiny of mankind the playing out of a great drama, or the action of a prolonged epic, all the generations of mankind become indissolubly united into a single image, combining all the power over the mind of the idea of Posterity, with our best feelings towards the living world which surrounds us, and towards the predecessors who have made us what we are. That the ennobling power of this grand conception may have its full efficacy, we should, with M. Comte, regard the Grand Etre, Humanity, or Mankind, as composed, in the past, solely of those who, in every age and variety of position, have played their part worthily in life. It is only as thus restricted that the aggregate of our species becomes an object deserving our veneration. The unworthy members of it are best dismissed from our habitual thoughts; and the imperfections which adhered through life, even to those of the dead who deserve honourable remembrance, should be no further borne in mind than is necessary not to falsify our conception of facts. On the other hand, the Grand Etre in its completeness ought to include not only all whom we venerate, but all sentient beings to which we owe duties, and which have a claim on our attachment. M. Comte, therefore, incorporates into the ideal object whose service is to be the law of our life, not our own species exclusively,



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but, in a subordinate degree, our humble auxiliaries, those animal races which enter into real society with man, which attach themselves to him, and voluntarily co-operate with him, like the noble dog who gives his life for his human friend and benefactor. For this M. Comte has been subjected to unworthy ridicule, but there is nothing truer or more honourable to him in the whole body of his doctrines. The strong sense he always shows of the worth of the inferior animals, and of the duties of mankind towards them, is one of the very finest traits of his character.

We, therefore, not only hold that M. Comte was justified in the attempt to develop his philosophy into a religion, and had realized the essential conditions of one, but that all other religions are made better in proportion as, in their practical result, they are brought to coincide with that which he aimed at constructing. But, unhappily, the next thing we are obliged to do, is to charge him with making a complete mistake at the very outset of his operations—with fundamentally misconceiving the proper office of a rule of life. He committed the error which is often, but falsely, charged against the whole class of utilitarian moralists; he required that the test of conduct should also be the exclusive motive to it. Because the good of the human race is the ultimate standard of right and wrong, and because moral discipline consists in cultivating the utmost possible repugnance to all conduct injurious to the general good, M. Comte infers that the good of others is the only inducement on which we should allow ourselves to act; and that we should endeavour to starve the whole of the desires which point to our personal satisfaction, by denying them all gratification not strictly required by physical necessities. The golden rule of morality, in M. Comte's religion, is to live for others, "vivre pour autrui." To do as we would be done by, and to love our neighbour as ourself, are not sufficient for him: they partake, he thinks, of the nature of personal calculations. We should endeavour not to love ourselves at all. We shall not succeed in it, but we should make the nearest approach to it possible. Nothing less will satisfy him, as towards humanity, than the sentiment which one of his favourite writers, Thomas a Kempis, addresses to God: *Amem te plus quam me, nec me nisi propter te*. All education and all moral discipline should have but one object, to make altruism (a word of his own coming) predominate over egoism. If by this were only meant that egoism is bound, and should be taught, always to give way to the well-understood interests of enlarged altruism, no one who acknowledges any morality at all would object to the proposition. But M. Comte, taking his stand on the biological fact that organs are strengthened by exercise and atrophied by disuse, and firmly convinced that each of our elementary inclinations has its distinct cerebral organ, thinks it the grand duty of life not only to strengthen the



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social affections by constant habit and by referring all our actions to them, but, as far as possible, to deaden the personal passions and propensities by desuetude. Even the exercise of the intellect is required to obey as an authoritative rule the dominion of the social feelings over the intelligence (*du coeur sur l'esprit*). The physical and other personal instincts are to be mortified far beyond the demands of bodily health, which indeed the morality of the future is not to insist much upon, for fear of encouraging "*les calculs personnels*." M. Comte condemns only such austerities as, by diminishing the vigour of the constitution, make us less capable of being useful to others. Any indulgence, even in food, not necessary to health and strength, he condemns as immoral. All gratifications except those of the affections, are to be tolerated only as "inevitable infirmities." Novalis said of Spinoza that he was a God-intoxicated man: M. Comte is a morality-intoxicated man. Every question with him is one of morality, and no motive but that of morality is permitted.

The explanation of this we find in an original mental twist, very common in French thinkers, and by which M. Comte was distinguished beyond them all. He could not dispense with what he called "unity." It was for the sake of Unity that a religion was, in his eyes, desirable. Not in the mere sense of Unanimity, but in a far wider one. A religion must be something by which to "systematize" human life. His definition of it, in the "Catechisme," is "the state of complete unity which distinguishes our existence, at once personal and social, when all its parts, both moral and physical, converge habitually to a common destination.... Such a harmony, individual and collective, being incapable of complete realization in an existence so complicated as ours, this definition of religion characterizes the immovable type towards which tends more and more the aggregate of human efforts. Our happiness and our merit consist especially in approaching as near as possible to this unity, of which the gradual increase constitutes the best measure of real improvement, personal or social." To this theme he continually returns, and argues that this unity or harmony among all the elements of our life is not consistent with the predominance of the personal propensities, since these drag us in different directions; it can only result from the subordination of them all to the social icelings, which may be made to act in a uniform direction by a common system of convictions, and which differ from the personal inclinations in this, that we all naturally encourage them in one another, while, on the contrary, social life is a perpetual restraint upon the selfish propensities.



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The *fons errorum* in M. Comte's later speculations is this inordinate demand for "unity" and "systematization." This is the reason why it does not suffice to him that all should be ready, in case of need, to postpone their personal interests and inclinations to the requirements of the general good: he demands that each should regard as vicious any care at all for his personal interests, except as a means to the good of others—should be ashamed of it, should strive to cure himself of it, because his existence is not "systematized," is not in "complete unity," as long as he cares for more than one thing. The strangest part of the matter is, that this doctrine seems to M. Comte to be axiomatic. That all perfection consists in unity, he apparently considers to be a maxim which no sane man thinks of questioning. It never seems to enter into his conceptions that any one could object *ab initio*, and ask, why this universal systematizing, systematizing, systematizing? Why is it necessary that all human life should point but to one object, and be cultivated into a system of means to a single end? May it not be the fact that mankind, who after all are made up of single human beings, obtain a greater sum of happiness when each pursues his own, under the rules and conditions required by the good of the rest, than when each makes the good of the rest his only subject, and allows himself no personal pleasures not indispensable to the preservation of his faculties? The regimen of a blockaded town should be cheerfully submitted to when high purposes require it, but is it the ideal perfection of human existence? M. Comte sees none of these difficulties. The only true happiness, he affirms, is in the exercise of the affections. He had found it so for a whole year, which was enough to enable him to get to the bottom of the question, and to judge whether he could do without everything else. Of course the supposition was not to be heard of that any other person could require, or be the better for, what M. Comte did not value. "Unity" and "systematization" absolutely demanded that all other people should model themselves after M. Comte. It would never do to suppose that there could be more than one road to human happiness, or more than one ingredient in it.

The most prejudiced must admit that this religion without theology is not chargeable with relaxation of moral restraints. On the contrary, it prodigiously exaggerates them. It makes the same ethical mistake as the theory of Calvinism, that every act in life should be done for the glory of God, and that whatever is not a duty is a sin. It does not perceive that between the region of duty and that of sin there is an intermediate space, the region of positive worthiness. It is not good that persons should be bound, by other people's opinion, to do everything that they would deserve praise for doing. There is a standard of altruism to which all should be required to come up, and a degree beyond it which is not obligatory,

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but meritorious. It is incumbent on every one to restrain the pursuit of his personal objects within the limits consistent with the essential interests of others. What those limits are, it is the province of ethical science to determine; and to keep all individuals and aggregations of individuals within them, is the proper office of punishment and of moral blame. If in addition to fulfilling this obligation, persons make the good of others a direct object of disinterested exertions, postponing or sacrificing to it even innocent personal indulgences, they deserve gratitude and honour, and are fit objects of moral praise. So long as they are in no way compelled to this conduct by any external pressure, there cannot be too much of it; but a necessary condition is its spontaneity; since the notion of a happiness for all, procured by the self-sacrifice of each, if the abnegation is really felt to be a sacrifice, is a contradiction. Such spontaneity by no means excludes sympathetic encouragement; but the encouragement should take the form of making self-devotion pleasant, not that of making everything else painful. The object should be to stimulate services to humanity by their natural rewards; not to render the pursuit of our own good in any other manner impossible, by visiting it with the reproaches of other and of our own conscience. The proper office of those sanctions is to enforce upon every one, the conduct necessary to give all other persons their fair chance: conduct which chiefly consists in not doing them harm, and not impeding them in anything which without harming others does good to themselves. To this must of course be added, that when we either expressly or tacitly undertake to do more, we are bound to keep our promise. And inasmuch as every one, who avails himself of the advantages of society, leads others to expect from him all such positive good offices and disinterested services as the moral improvement attained by mankind has rendered customary, he deserves moral blame if, without just cause, he disappoints that expectation. Through this principle the domain of moral duty is always widening. When what once was uncommon virtue becomes common virtue, it comes to be numbered among obligations, while a degree exceeding what has grown common, remains simply meritorious.

M. Comte is accustomed to draw most of his ideas of moral cultivation from the discipline of the Catholic Church. Had he followed that guidance in the present case, he would have been less wide of the mark. For the distinction which we have drawn was fully recognized by the sagacious and far-sighted men who created the Catholic ethics. It is even one of the stock reproaches against Catholicism, that it has two standards of morality, and does not make obligatory on all Christians the highest rule of Christian perfection. It has one standard which, faithfully acted up to, suffices for salvation, another and a higher which when realized constitutes a saint. M. Comte, perhaps unconsciously, for there is nothing that he would have been more unlikely to do if he had been aware of it, has taken a leaf out of the book of the despised Protestantism. Like the extreme Calvinists, he requires that all believers shall be saints, and damns then (after his own fashion) if they are not.

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Our conception of human life is different. We do not conceive life to be so rich in enjoyments, that it can afford to forego the cultivation of all those which address themselves to what M. Comte terms the egoistic propensities. On the contrary, we believe that a sufficient gratification of these, short of excess, but up to the measure which renders the enjoyment greatest, is almost always favourable to the benevolent affections. The moralization of the personal enjoyments we deem to consist, not in reducing them to the smallest possible amount, but in cultivating the habitual wish to share them with others, and with all others, and scorning to desire anything for oneself which is incapable of being so shared. There is only one passion or inclination which is permanently incompatible with this condition—the love of domination, or superiority, for its own sake; which implies, and is grounded on, the equivalent depression of other people. As a rule of conduct, to be enforced by moral sanctions, we think no more should be attempted than to prevent people from doing harm to others, or omitting to do such good as they have undertaken. Demanding no more than this, society, in any tolerable circumstances, obtains much more; for the natural activity of human nature, shut out from all noxious directions, will expand itself in useful ones. This is our conception of the moral rule prescribed by the religion of Humanity. But above this standard there is an unlimited range of moral worth, up to the most exalted heroism, which should be fostered by every positive encouragement, though not converted into an obligation. It is as much a part of our scheme as of M. Comte's, that the direct cultivation of altruism, and the subordination of egoism to it, far beyond the point of absolute moral duty, should be one of the chief aims of education, both individual and collective. We even recognize the value, for this end, of ascetic discipline, in the original Greek sense of the word. We think with Dr Johnson, that he who has never denied himself anything which is not wrong, cannot be fully trusted for denying himself everything which is so. We do not doubt that children and young persons will one day be again systematically disciplined in self-mortification; that they will be taught, as in antiquity, to control their appetites, to brave dangers, and submit voluntarily to pain, as simple exercises in education. Something has been lost as well as gained by no longer giving to every citizen the training necessary for a soldier. Nor can any pains taken be too great, to form the habit, and develop the desire, of being useful to others and to the world, by the practice, independently of reward and of every personal consideration, of positive virtue beyond the bounds of prescribed duty. No efforts should be spared to associate the pupil's self-respect, and his desire of the respect of others, with service rendered to Humanity; when possible, collectively, but at all events, what is always possible,

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in the persons of its individual members. There are many remarks and precepts in M. Comte's volumes, which, as no less pertinent to our conception of morality than to his, we fully accept. For example; without admitting that to make "calculs personnels" is contrary to morality, we agree with him in the opinion, that the principal hygienic precepts should be inculcated, not solely or principally as maxims of prudence, but as a matter of duty to others, since by squandering our health we disable ourselves from rendering to our fellow-creatures the services to which they are entitled. As M. Comte truly says, the prudential motive is by no means fully sufficient for the purpose, even physicians often disregarding their own precepts. The personal penalties of neglect of health are commonly distant, as well as more or less uncertain, and require the additional and more immediate sanction of moral responsibility. M. Comte, therefore, in this instance, is, we conceive, right in principle; though we have not the smallest doubt that he would have gone into extreme exaggeration in practice, and would have wholly ignored the legitimate liberty of the individual to judge for himself respecting his own bodily conditions, with due relation to the sufficiency of his means of knowledge, and taking the responsibility of the result.

Connected with the same considerations is another idea of M. Comte, which has great beauty and grandeur in it, and the realization of which, within the bounds of possibility, would be a cultivation of the social feelings on a most essential point. It is, that every person who lives by any useful work, should be habituated to regard himself not as an individual working for his private benefit, but as a public functionary; and his wages, of whatever sort, as not the remuneration or purchase-money of his labour, which should be given freely, but as the provision made by society to enable him to carry it on, and to replace the materials and products which have been consumed in the process. M. Comte observes, that in modern industry every one in fact works much more for others than for himself, since his productions are to be consumed by others, and it is only necessary that his thoughts and imagination should adapt themselves to the real state of the fact. The practical problem, however, is not quite so simple, for a strong sense that he is working for others may lead to nothing better than feeling himself necessary to them, and instead of freely giving his commodity, may only encourage him to put a high price upon it. What M. Comte really means is that we should regard working for the benefit of others as a good in itself; that we should desire it for its own sake, and not for the sake of remuneration, which cannot justly be claimed for doing what we like: that the proper return for a service to society is the gratitude of society: and that the moral claim of any one in regard to the provision for his personal wants, is

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not a question of *quid pro quo* in respect to his co-operation, but of how much the circumstances of society permit to be assigned to him, consistently with the just claims of others. To this opinion we entirely subscribe. The rough method of settling the labourer's share of the produce, the competition of the market, may represent a practical necessity, but certainly not a moral ideal. Its defence is, that civilization has not hitherto been equal to organizing anything better than this first rude approach to an equitable distribution. Rude as it is, we for the present go less wrong by leaving the thing to settle itself, than by settling it artificially in any mode which has yet been tried. But in whatever manner that question may ultimately be decided, the true moral and social idea of Labour is in no way affected by it. Until labourers and employers perform the work of industry in the spirit in which soldiers perform that of an army, industry will never be moralized, and military life will remain, what, in spite of the anti-social character of its direct object, it has hitherto been—the chief school of moral co-operation.

Thus far of the general idea of M. Comte's ethics and religion. We must now say something of the details. Here we approach the ludicrous side of the subject: but we shall unfortunately have to relate other things far more really ridiculous.

There cannot be a religion without a *cultus*. We use this term for want of any other, for its nearest equivalent, worship, suggests a different order of ideas. We mean by it, a set of systematic observances, intended to cultivate and maintain the religious sentiment. Though M. Comte justly appreciates the superior efficacy of acts, in keeping up and strengthening the feeling which prompts them, over any mode whatever of mere expression, he takes pains to organize the latter also with great minuteness. He provides an equivalent both for the private devotions, and for the public ceremonies, of other faiths. The reader will be surprised to learn, that the former consists of prayer. But prayer, as understood by M. Comte, does not mean asking; it is a mere outpouring of feeling; and for this view of it he claims the authority of the Christian mystics. It is not to be addressed to the Grand Etre, to collective Humanity; though he occasionally carries metaphor so far as to style this a goddess. The honours to collective Humanity are reserved for the public celebrations. Private adoration is to be addressed to it in the persons of worthy individual representatives, who may be either living or dead, but must in all cases be women; for women, being the *sexe aimant*, represent the best attribute of humanity, that which ought to regulate all human life, nor can Humanity possibly be symbolized in any form but that of a woman. The objects of private adoration are the mother, the wife, and the daughter, representing severally the past, the present, and the future, and

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calling into active exercise the three social sentiments, veneration, attachment, and kindness. We are to regard them, whether dead or alive, as our guardian angels, “les vrais anges gardiens.” If the last two have never existed, or if, in the particular case, any of the three types is too faulty for the office assigned to it, their place may be supplied by some other type of womanly excellence, even by one merely historical. Be the object living or dead, the adoration (as we understand it) is to be addressed only to the idea. The prayer consists of two parts; a commemoration, followed by an effusion. By a commemoration M. Comte means an effort of memory and imagination, summoning up with the utmost possible vividness the image of the object: and every artifice is exhausted to render the image as life-like, as close to the reality, as near an approach to actual hallucination, as is consistent with sanity. This degree of intensity having been, as far as practicable, attained, the effusion follows. Every person should compose his own form of prayer, which should be repeated not mentally only, but orally, and may be added to or varied for sufficient cause, but never arbitrarily. It may be interspersed with passages from the best poets, when they present themselves spontaneously, as giving a felicitous expression to the adorer’s own feeling. These observances M. Comte practised to the memory of his Clotilde, and he enjoins them on all true believers. They are to occupy two hours of every day, divided into three parts; at rising, in the middle of the working hours, and in bed at night. The first, which should be in a kneeling attitude, will commonly be the longest, and the second the shortest. The third is to be extended as nearly as possible to the moment of falling asleep, that its effect may be felt in disciplining even the dreams.

The public *cultus* consists of a series of celebrations or festivals, eighty-four in the year, so arranged that at least one occurs in every week. They are devoted to the successive glorification of Humanity itself; of the various ties, political and domestic, among mankind; of the successive stages in the past evolution of our species; and of the several classes into which M. Comte’s polity divides mankind. M. Comte’s religion has, moreover, nine Sacraments; consisting in the solemn consecration, by the priests of Humanity, with appropriate exhortations, of all the great transitions in life; the entry into life itself, and into each of its successive stages: education, marriage, the choice of a profession, and so forth. Among these is death, which receives the name of transformation, and is considered as a passage from objective existence to subjective—to living in the memory of our fellow-creatures. Having no eternity of objective existence to offer, M. Comte’s religion gives it all he can, by holding out the hope of subjective immortality—of existing in the remembrance and in the posthumous

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adoration of mankind at large, if we have done anything to deserve remembrance from them; at all events, of those whom we loved during life; and when they too are gone, of being included in the collective adoration paid to the Grand Etre. People are to be taught to look forward to this as a sufficient recompense for the devotion of a whole life to the service of Humanity. Seven years after death, comes the last Sacrament: a public judgment, by the priesthood, on the memory of the defunct. This is not designed for purposes of reprobation, but of honour, and any one may, by declaration during life, exempt himself from it. If judged, and found worthy, he is solemnly incorporated with the Grand Etre, and his remains are transferred from the civil to the religious place of sepulture: "le bois sacre" qui doit entourer chaque temple de l'Humanite."

This brief abstract gives no idea of the minuteness of M. Comte's prescriptions, and the extraordinary height to which he carries the mania for regulation by which Frenchmen are distinguished among Europeans, and M. Comte among Frenchmen. It is this which throws an irresistible air of ridicule over the whole subject. There is nothing really ridiculous in the devotional practices which M. Comte recommends towards a cherished memory or an ennobling ideal, when they come unprompted from the depths of the individual feeling; but there is something ineffably ludicrous in enjoining that everybody shall practise them three times daily for a period of two hours, not because his feelings require them, but for the premeditated, purpose of getting his feelings up. The ludicrous, however, in any of its shapes, is a phaenomenon with which M. Comte seems to have been totally unacquainted. There is nothing in his writings from which it could be inferred that he knew of the existence of such things as wit and humour. The only writer distinguished for either, of whom he shows any admiration, is Moliere, and him he admires not for his wit but for his wisdom. We notice this without intending any reflection on M. Comte; for a profound conviction raises a person above the feeling of ridicule. But there are passages in his writings which, it really seems to us, could have been written by no man who had ever laughed. We will give one of these instances. Besides the regular prayers, M. Comte's religion, like the Catholic, has need of forms which can be applied to casual and unforeseen occasions. These, he says, must in general be left to the believer's own choice; but he suggests as a very suitable one the repetition of "the fundamental formula of Positivism," viz., "l'amour pour principe, l'ordre pour base, et le progres pour but." Not content, however, with an equivalent for the Paters and Aves of Catholicism, he must have one for the sign of the cross also; and he thus delivers himself:[23] "Cette expansion peut etre perfectionnee par des signes universels.... Afin de mieux developper l'aptitude necessaire



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de la formule positiviste a représenter toujours la condition humaine, il convient ordinairement de l'énoncer en touchant successivement les principaux organes que la théorie cérébrale assigne a ses trois éléments." This *may* be a very appropriate mode of expressing one's devotion to the Grand Etre: but any one who had appreciated its effect on the profane reader, would have thought it judicious to keep it back till a considerably more advanced stage in the propagation of the Positive Religion.

As M. Comte's religion has a *cultus*, so also it has a clergy, who are the pivot of his entire social and political system. Their nature and office will be best shown by describing his ideal of political society in its normal state, with the various classes of which it is composed.

The necessity of a Spiritual Power, distinct and separate from the temporal government, is the essential principle of M. Comte's political scheme; as it may well be, since the Spiritual Power is the only counterpoise he provides or tolerates, to the absolute dominion of the civil rulers. Nothing can exceed his combined detestation and contempt for government by assemblies, and for parliamentary or representative institutions in any form. They are an expedient, in his opinion, only suited to a state of transition, and even that nowhere but in England. The attempt to naturalize them in France, or any Continental nation, he regards as mischievous quackery. Louis Napoleon's usurpation is absolved, is made laudable to him, because it overthrew a representative government. Election of superiors by inferiors, except as a revolutionary expedient, is an abomination in his sight. Public functionaries of all kinds should name their successors, subject to the approbation of their own superiors, and giving public notice of the nomination so long beforehand as to admit of discussion, and the timely revocation of a wrong choice. But, by the side of the temporal rulers, he places another authority, with no power to command, but only to advise and remonstrate. The family being, in his mind as in that of Frenchmen generally, the foundation and essential type of all society, the separation of the two powers commences there. The spiritual, or moral and religious power, in a family, is the women of it. The positivist family is composed of the "fundamental couple," their children, and the parents of the man, if alive. The whole government of the household, except as regards the education of the children, resides in the man; and even over that he has complete power, but should forbear to exert it. The part assigned to the women is to improve the man through his affections, and to bring up the children, who, until the age of fourteen, at which scientific instruction begins, are to be educated wholly by their mother. That women may be better fitted for these functions, they are peremptorily excluded from all others. No woman is to work for her living. Every woman is to

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be supported by her husband or her male relations, and if she has none of these, by the State. She is to have no powers of government, even domestic, and no property. Her legal rights of inheritance are preserved to her, that her feelings of duty may make her voluntarily forego them. There are to be no marriage portions, that women may no longer be sought in marriage from interested motives. Marriages are to be rigidly indissoluble, except for a single cause. It is remarkable that the bitterest enemy of divorce among all philosophers, nevertheless allows it, in a case which the laws of England, and of other countries reproached by him with tolerating divorce, do not admit: namely, when one of the parties has been sentenced to an infamizing punishment, involving loss of civil rights. It is monstrous that condemnation, even for life, to a felon's punishment, should leave an unhappy victim bound to, and in the wife's case under the legal authority of, the culprit. M. Comte could feel for the injustice in this special case, because it chanced to be the unfortunate situation of his Clotilde. Minor degrees of unworthiness may entitle the innocent party to a legal separation, but without the power of re-marriage. Second marriages, indeed, are not permitted by the Positive Religion. There is to be no impediment to them by law, but morality is to condemn them, and every couple who are married religiously as well as civilly are to make a vow of eternal widowhood, "le veuvage eternel." This absolute monogamy is, in M. Comte's opinion, essential to the complete fusion between two beings, which is the essence of marriage; and moreover, eternal constancy is required by the posthumous adoration, which is to be continuously paid by the survivor to one who, though objectively dead, still lives "subjectively." The domestic spiritual power, which resides in the women of the family, is chiefly concentrated in the most venerable of them, the husband's mother, while alive. It has an auxiliary in the influence of age, represented by the husband's father, who is supposed to have passed the period of retirement from active life, fixed by M. Comte (for he fixes everything) at sixty-three; at which age the head of the family gives up the reins of authority to his son, retaining only a consultative voice.

This domestic Spiritual Power, being principally moral, and confined to a private life, requires the support and guidance of an intellectual power exterior to it, the sphere of which will naturally be wider, extending also to public life. This consists of the clergy, or priesthood, for M. Comte is fond of borrowing the consecrated expressions of Catholicism to denote the nearest equivalents which his own system affords. The clergy are the theoretic or philosophical class, and are supported by an endowment from the State, voted periodically, but administered by themselves. Like women, they are to be excluded from all riches, and from all participation in power (except the absolute



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power of each over his own household). They are neither to inherit, nor to receive emolument from any of their functions, or from their writings or teachings of any description, but are to live solely on their small salaries. This M. Comte deems necessary to the complete disinterestedness of their counsel. To have the confidence of the masses, they must, like the masses, be poor. Their exclusion from political and from all other practical occupations is indispensable for the same reason, and for others equally peremptory. Those occupations are, he contends, incompatible with the habits of mind necessary to philosophers. A practical position, either private or public, chains the mind to specialities and details, while a philosopher's business is with general truths and connected views (*vues d'ensemble*). These, again, require an habitual abstraction from details, which unfits the mind for judging well and rapidly of individual cases. The same person cannot be both a good theorist and a good practitioner or ruler, though practitioners and rulers ought to have a solid theoretic education. The two kinds of function must be absolutely exclusive of one another: to attempt them both, is inconsistent with fitness for either. But as men may mistake their vocation, up to the age of thirty-five they are allowed to change their career.

To the clergy is entrusted the theoretic or scientific instruction of youth. The medical art also is to be in their hands, since no one is fit to be a physician who does not study and understand the whole man, moral as well as physical. M. Comte has a contemptuous opinion of the existing race of physicians, who, he says, deserve no higher name than that of *veterinaires*, since they concern themselves with man only in his animal, and not in his human character. In his last years, M. Comte (as we learn from Dr Robinet's volume) indulged in the wildest speculations on medical science, declaring all maladies to be one and the same disease, the disturbance or destruction of "*l'unite cerebrale*." The other functions of the clergy are moral, much more than intellectual. They are the spiritual directors, and venerated advisers, of the active or practical classes, including the political. They are the mediators in all social differences; between the labourers, for instance, and their employers. They are to advise and admonish on all important violations of the moral law. Especially, it devolves on them to keep the rich and powerful to the performance of their moral duties towards their inferiors. If private remonstrance fails, public denunciation is to follow: in extreme cases they may proceed to the length of excommunication, which, though it only operates through opinion, yet if it carries opinion with it, may, as M. Comte complacently observes, be of such powerful efficacy, that the richest man may be driven to produce his subsistence by his own manual labour, through the impossibility of inducing any other person to work for him. In this as in



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all other cases, the priesthood depends for its authority on carrying with it the mass of the people—those who, possessing no accumulations, live on the wages of daily labour; popularly but incorrectly termed the working classes, and by French writers, in their Roman law phraseology, *proletaires*. These, therefore, who are not allowed the smallest political rights, are incorporated into the Spiritual Power, of which they form, after women and the clergy, the third element.

It remains to give an account of the Temporal Power, composed of the rich and the employers of labour, two classes who in M. Comte's system are reduced to one, for he allows of no idle rich. A life made up of mere amusement and self-indulgence, though not interdicted by law, is to be deemed so disgraceful, that nobody with the smallest sense of shame would choose to be guilty of it. Here, we think, M. Comte has lighted on a true principle, towards which the tone of opinion in modern Europe is more and more tending, and which is destined to be one of the constitutive principles of regenerated society. We believe, for example, with him, that in the future there will be no class of landlords living at ease on their rents, but every landlord will be a capitalist trained to agriculture, himself superintending and directing the cultivation of his estate. No one but he who guides the work, should have the control of the tools. In M. Comte's system, the rich, as a rule, consist of the "captains of industry:" but the rule is not entirely without exception, for M. Comte recognizes other useful modes of employing riches. In particular, one of his favourite ideas is that of an order of Chivalry, composed of the most generous and self-devoted of the rich, voluntarily dedicating themselves, like knights-errant of old, to the redressing of wrongs, and the protection of the weak and oppressed. He remarks, that oppression, in modern life, can seldom reach, or even venture to attack, the life or liberty of its victims (he forgets the case of domestic tyranny), but only their pecuniary means, and it is therefore by the purse chiefly that individuals can usefully interpose, as they formerly did by the sword. The occupation, however, of nearly all the rich, will be the direction of labour, and for this work they will be educated. Reciprocally, it is in M. Comte's opinion essential, that all directors of labour should be rich. Capital (in which he includes land) should be concentrated in a few holders, so that every capitalist may conduct the most extensive operations which one mind is capable of superintending. This is not only demanded by good economy, in order to take the utmost advantage of a rare kind of practical ability, but it necessarily follows from the principle of M. Comte's scheme, which regards a capitalist as a public functionary. M. Comte's conception of the relation of capital to society is essentially that of Socialists, but he would bring about by education

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and opinion, what they aim at effecting by positive institution. The owner of capital is by no means to consider himself its absolute proprietor. Legally he is not to be controlled in his dealings with it, for power should be in proportion to responsibility: but it does not belong to him for his own use; he is merely entrusted by society with a portion of the accumulations made by the past providence of mankind, to be administered for the benefit of the present generation and of posterity, under the obligation of preserving them unimpaired, and handing them down, more or less augmented, to our successors. He is not entitled to dissipate them, or divert them from the service of Humanity to his own pleasures. Nor has he a moral right to consume on himself the whole even of his profits. He is bound in conscience, if they exceed his reasonable wants, to employ the surplus in improving either the efficiency of his operations, or the physical and mental condition of his labourers. The portion of his gains which he may appropriate to his own use, must be decided by himself, under accountability to opinion; and opinion ought not to look very narrowly into the matter, nor hold him to a rigid reckoning for any moderate indulgence of luxury or ostentation; since under the great responsibilities that will be imposed on him, the position of an employer of labour will be so much less desirable, to any one in whom the instincts of pride and vanity are not strong, than the "heureuse insouciance" of a labourer, that those instincts must be to a certain degree indulged, or no one would undertake the office. With this limitation, every employer is a mere administrator of his possessions, for his work-people and for society at large. If he indulges himself lavishly, without reserving an ample remuneration for all who are employed under him, he is morally culpable, and will incur sacerdotal admonition. This state of things necessarily implies that capital should be in few hands, because, as M. Comte observes, without great riches, the obligations which society ought to impose, could not be fulfilled without an amount of personal abnegation that it would be hopeless to expect. If a person is conspicuously qualified for the conduct of an industrial enterprise, but destitute of the fortune necessary for undertaking it, M. Comte recommends that he should be enriched by subscription, or, in cases of sufficient importance, by the State. Small landed proprietors and capitalists, and the middle classes altogether, he regards as a parasitic growth, destined to disappear, the best of the body becoming large capitalists, and the remainder proletaires. Society will consist only of rich and poor, and it will be the business of the rich to make the best possible lot for the poor. The remuneration of the labourers will continue, as at present, to be a matter of voluntary arrangement between them and their employers, the last resort on either side being refusal of co-operation, "refus de



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conours," in other words, a strike or a lock-out; with the sacerdotal order for mediators in case of need. But though wages are to be an affair of free contract, their standard is not to be the competition of the market, but the application of the products in equitable proportion between the wants of the labourers and the wants and dignity of the employer. As it is one of M. Comte's principles that a question cannot be usefully proposed without an attempt at a solution, he gives his ideas from the beginning as to what the normal income of a labouring family should be. They are on such a scale, that until some great extension shall have taken place in the scientific resources of mankind, it is no wonder he thinks it necessary to limit as much as possible the number of those who are to be supported by what is left of the produce. In the first place the labourer's dwelling, which is to consist of seven rooms, is, with all that it contains, to be his own property: it is the only landed property he is allowed to possess, but every family should be the absolute owner of all things which are destined for its exclusive use. Lodging being thus independently provided for, and education and medical attendance being secured gratuitously by the general arrangements of society, the pay of the labourer is to consist of two portions, the one monthly, and of fixed amount, the other weekly, and proportioned to the produce of his labour. The former M. Comte fixes at 100 francs (L4) for a month of 28 days; being L52 a year: and the rate of piece-work should be such as to make the other part amount to an average of seven francs (5\_s\_. 6d.) per working day.

Agreeably to M. Comte's rule, that every public functionary should appoint his successor, the capitalist has unlimited power of transmitting his capital by gift or bequest, after his own death or retirement. In general it will be best bestowed entire upon one person, unless the business will advantageously admit of subdivision. He will naturally leave it to one or more of his sons, if sufficiently qualified; and rightly so, hereditary being, in M. Comte's opinion, preferable to acquired wealth, as being usually more generously administered. But, merely as his sons, they have no moral right to it. M. Comte here recognizes another of the principles, on which we believe that the constitution of regenerated society will rest. He maintains (as others in the present generation have done) that the father owes nothing to his son, except a good education, and pecuniary aid sufficient for an advantageous start in life: that he is entitled, and may be morally bound, to leave the bulk of his fortune to some other properly selected person or persons, whom he judges likely to make a more beneficial use of it. This is the first of three important points, in which M. Comte's theory of the family, wrong as we deem it in its foundations, is in advance of prevailing theories and existing institutions. The second is the re-introduction



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of adoption, not only in default of children, but to fulfil the purposes, and satisfy the sympathetic wants, to which such children as there are may happen to be inadequate. The third is a most important point—the incorporation of domestics as substantive members of the family. There is hardly any part of the present constitution of society more essentially vicious, and morally injurious to both parties, than the relation between masters and servants. To make this a really human and a moral relation, is one of the principal desiderata in social improvement. The feeling of the vulgar of all classes, that domestic service has anything in it peculiarly mean, is a feeling than which there is none meaner. In the feudal ages, youthful nobles of the highest rank thought themselves honoured by officiating in what is now called a menial capacity, about the persons of superiors of both sexes, for whom they felt respect: and, as M. Comte observes, there are many families who can in no other way so usefully serve Humanity, as by ministering to the bodily wants of other families, called to functions which require the devotion of all their thoughts. “We will add, by way of supplement to M. Comte’s doctrine, that much of the daily physical work of a household, even in opulent families, if silly notions of degradation, common to all ranks, did not interfere, might very advantageously be performed by the family itself, at least by its younger members; to whom it would give healthful exercise of the bodily powers, which has now to be sought in modes far less useful, and also a familiar acquaintance with the real work of the world, and a moral willingness to take their share of its burthens, which, in the great majority of the better-off classes, do not now get cultivated at all.

We have still to speak of the directly political functions of the rich, or, as M. Comte terms them, the patriciate. The entire political government is to be in their hands. First, however, the existing nations are to be broken up into small republics, the largest not exceeding the size of Belgium, Portugal, or Tuscany; any larger nationalities being incompatible with the unity of wants and feelings, which is required, not only to give due strength to the sentiment of patriotism (always strongest in small states), but to prevent undue compression; for no territory, M. Comte thinks, can without oppression be governed from a distant centre. Algeria, therefore, is to be given up to the Arabs, Corsica to its inhabitants, and France proper is to be, before the end of the century, divided into seventeen republics, corresponding to the number of considerable towns: Paris, however, (need it be said?) succeeding to Rome as the religious metropolis of the world. Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, are to be separated from England, which is of course to detach itself from all its transmarine dependencies. In each state thus constituted, the powers of government are to be vested in a triumvirate of the three principal



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bankers, who are to take the foreign, home, and financial departments respectively. How they are to conduct the government and remain bankers, does not clearly appear; but it must be intended that they should combine both offices, for they are to receive no pecuniary remuneration for the political one. Their power is to amount to a dictatorship (M. Comte's own word): and he is hardly justified in saying that he gives political power to the rich, since he gives it over the rich and every one else, to three individuals of the number, not even chosen by the rest, but named by their predecessors. As a check on the dictators, there is to be complete freedom of speech, writing, printing, and voluntary association; and all important acts of the government, except in cases of emergency, are to be announced sufficiently long beforehand to ensure ample discussion. This, and the influences of the Spiritual Power, are the only guarantees provided against misgovernment. When we consider that the complete dominion of every nation of mankind is thus handed over to only four men—for the Spiritual Power is to be under the absolute and undivided control of a single Pontiff for the whole human race—one is appalled at the picture of entire subjugation and slavery, which is recommended to us as the last and highest result of the evolution of Humanity. But the conception rises to the terrific, when we are told the mode in which the single High Priest of Humanity is intended to use his authority. It is the most warning example we know, into what frightful aberrations a powerful and comprehensive mind may be led by the exclusive following out of a single idea.

The single idea of M. Comte, on this subject, is that the intellect should be wholly subordinated to the feelings; or, to translate the meaning out of sentimental into logical language, that the exercise of the intellect, as of all our other faculties, should have for its sole object the general good. Every other employment of it should be accounted not only idle and frivolous, but morally culpable. Being indebted wholly to Humanity for the cultivation to which we owe our mental powers, we are bound in return to consecrate them wholly to her service. Having made up his mind that this ought to be, there is with M. Comte but one step to concluding that the Grand Pontiff of Humanity must take care that it shall be; and on this foundation he organizes an elaborate system for the total suppression of all independent thought. He does not, indeed, invoke the arm of the law, or call for any prohibitions. The clergy are to have no monopoly. Any one else may cultivate science if he can, may write and publish if he can find readers, may give private instruction if anybody consents to receive it. But since the sacerdotal body will absorb into itself all but those whom it deems either intellectually or morally unequal to the vocation, all rival teachers will, as he calculates, be so discredited beforehand, that

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their competition will not be formidable. Within the body itself, the High Priest has it in his power to make sure that there shall be no opinions, and no exercise of mind, but such as he approves; for he alone decides the duties and local residence of all its members, and can even eject them from the body. Before electing to be under this rule, we feel a natural curiosity to know in what manner it is to be exercised. Humanity has only yet had one Pontiff, whose mental qualifications for the post are not likely to be often surpassed, M. Comte himself. It is of some importance to know what are the ideas of this High Priest, concerning the moral and religious government of the human intellect.

One of the doctrines which M. Comte most strenuously enforces in his later writings is, that during the preliminary evolution of humanity, terminated by the foundation of Positivism, the free development of our forces of all kinds was the important matter, but that from this time forward the principal need is to regulate them. Formerly the danger was of their being insufficient, but henceforth, of their being abused. Let us express, in passing, our entire dissent from this doctrine. Whoever thinks that the wretched education which mankind as yet receive, calls forth their mental powers (except those of a select few) in a sufficient or even tolerable degree, must be very easily satisfied: and the abuse of them, far from becoming proportionally greater as knowledge and mental capacity increase, becomes rapidly less, provided always that the diffusion of those qualities keeps pace with their growth. The abuse of intellectual power is only to be dreaded, when society is divided between a few highly cultivated intellects and an ignorant and stupid multitude. But mental power is a thing which M. Comte does not want—or wants infinitely less than he wants submission and obedience. Of all the ingredients of human nature, he continually says, the intellect most needs to be disciplined and reined-in. It is the most turbulent “le plus perturbateur,” of all the mental elements; more so than even the selfish instincts. Throughout the whole modern transition, beginning with ancient Greece (for M. Comte tells us that we have always been in a state of revolutionary transition since then), the intellect has been in a state of systematic insurrection against “le coeur.” The metaphysicians and literati (lettres), after helping to pull down the old religion and social order, are rootedly hostile to the construction of the new, and desiring only to prolong the existing scepticism and intellectual anarchy, which secure to them a cheap social ascendancy, without the labour of earning it by solid scientific preparation. The scientific class, from whom better might have been expected, are, if possible, worse. Void of enlarged views, despising all that is too large for their comprehension, devoted exclusively each to his special science, contemptuously indifferent



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to moral and political interests, their sole aim is to acquire an easy reputation, and in France (through paid Academies and professorships) personal lucre, by pushing their sciences into idle and useless inquiries (speculations oiseuses), of no value to the real interests of mankind, and tending to divert the thoughts from them. One of the duties most incumbent on opinion and on the Spiritual Power, is to stigmatize as immoral, and effectually suppress, these useless employments of the speculative faculties. All exercise of thought should be abstained from, which has not some beneficial tendency, some actual utility to mankind. M. Comte, of course, is not the man to say that it must be a merely material utility. If a speculation, though it has no doctrinal, has a logical value—if it throws any light on universal Method—it is still more deserving of cultivation than if its usefulness was merely practical: but, either as method or as doctrine, it must bring forth fruits to Humanity, otherwise it is not only contemptible, but criminal.

That there is a portion of truth at the bottom of all this, we should be the last to deny. No respect is due to any employment of the intellect which does not tend to the good of mankind. It is precisely on a level with any idle amusement, and should be condemned as waste of time, if carried beyond the limit within which amusement is permissible. And whoever devotes powers of thought which could render to Humanity services it urgently needs, to speculations and studies which it could dispense with, is liable to the discredit attaching to a well-grounded suspicion of caring little for Humanity. But who can affirm positively of any speculations, guided by right scientific methods, on subjects really accessible to the human faculties, that they are incapable of being of any use? Nobody knows what knowledge will prove to be of use, and what is destined to be useless. The most that can be said is that some kinds are of more certain, and above all, of more present utility than others. How often the most important practical results have been the remote consequence of studies which no one would have expected to lead to them! Could the mathematicians, who, in the schools of Alexandria, investigated the properties of the ellipse, have foreseen that nearly two thousand years afterwards their speculations would explain the solar system, and a little later would enable ships safely to circumnavigate the earth? Even in M. Comte's opinion, it is well for mankind that, in those early days, knowledge was thought worth pursuing for its own sake. Nor has the "foundation of Positivism," we imagine, so far changed the conditions of human existence, that it should now be criminal to acquire, by observation and reasoning, a knowledge of the facts of the universe, leaving to posterity to find a use for it. Even in the last two or three years, has not the discovery of new metals, which may prove important even in the practical



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arts, arisen from one of the investigations which M. Comte most unequivocally condemns as idle, the research into the internal constitution of the sun? How few, moreover, of the discoveries which have changed the face of the world, either were or could have been arrived at by investigations aiming directly at the object! Would the mariner's compass ever have been found by direct efforts for the improvement of navigation? Should we have reached the electric telegraph by any amount of striving for a means of instantaneous communication, if Franklin had not identified electricity with lightning, and Ampere with magnetism? The most apparently insignificant archaeological or geological fact, is often found to throw a light on human history, which M. Comte, the basis of whose social philosophy is history, should be the last person to disparage. The direction of the entrance to the three great Pyramids of Ghizeh, by showing the position of the circumpolar stars at the time when they were built, is the best evidence we even now have of the immense antiquity of Egyptian civilization.[24] The one point on which M. Comte's doctrine has some colour of reason, is the case of sidereal astronomy: so little knowledge of it being really accessible to us, and the connexion of that little with any terrestrial interests being, according to all our means of judgment, infinitesimal. It is certainly difficult to imagine how any considerable benefit to humanity can be derived from a knowledge of the motions of the double stars: should these ever become important to us it will be in so prodigiously remote an age, that we can afford to remain ignorant of them until, at least, all our moral, political, and social difficulties have been settled. Yet the discovery that gravitation extends even to those remote regions, gives some additional strength to the conviction of the universality of natural laws; and the habitual meditation on such vast objects and distances is not without an aesthetic usefulness, by kindling and exalting the imagination, the worth of which in itself, and even its re-action on the intellect, M. Comte is quite capable of appreciating. He would reply, however, that there are better means of accomplishing these purposes. In the same spirit he condemns the study even of the solar system, when extended to any planets but those which are visible to the naked eye, and which alone exert an appreciable gravitative influence on the earth. Even the perturbations he thinks it idle to study, beyond a mere general conception of them, and thinks that astronomy may well limit its domain to the motions and mutual action of the earth, sun, and moon. He looks for a similar expurgation of all the other sciences. In one passage he expressly says that the greater part of the researches which are really accessible to us are idle and useless. He would pare down the dimensions of all the sciences as narrowly as possible. He is continually repeating that no science, as an abstract study, should be carried further



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than is necessary to lay the foundation for the science next above it, and so ultimately for moral science, the principal purpose of them all. Any further extension of the mathematical and physical sciences should be merely "episodic;" limited to what may from time to time be demanded by the requirements of industry and the arts; and should be left to the industrial classes, except when they find it necessary to apply to the sacerdotal order for some additional development of scientific theory. This, he evidently thinks, would be a rare contingency, most physical truths sufficiently concrete and real for practice being empirical. Accordingly in estimating the number of clergy necessary for France, Europe, and our entire planet (for his forethought extends thus far), he proportions it solely to their moral and religious attributions (overlooking, by the way, even their medical); and leaves nobody with any time to cultivate the sciences, except abortive candidates for the priestly office, who having been refused admittance into it for insufficiency in moral excellence or in strength of character, may be thought worth retaining as "pensioners" of the sacerdotal order, on account of their theoretic abilities.

It is no exaggeration to say, that M. Comte gradually acquired a real hatred for scientific and all purely intellectual pursuits, and was bent on retaining no more of them than was strictly indispensable. The greatest of his anxieties is lest people should reason, and seek to know, more than enough. He regards all abstraction and all reasoning as morally dangerous, by developing an inordinate pride (*orgueil*), and still more, by producing dryness (*scheresse*). Abstract thought, he says, is not a wholesome occupation for more than a small number of human beings, nor of them for more than a small part of their time. Art, which calls the emotions into play along with and more than the reason, is the only intellectual exercise really adapted to human nature. It is nevertheless indispensable that the chief theories of the various abstract sciences, together with the modes in which those theories were historically and logically arrived at, should form a part of universal education: for, first, it is only thus that the methods can be learnt, by which to attain the results sought by the moral and social sciences: though we cannot perceive that M. Comte got at his own moral and social results by those processes. Secondly, the principal truths of the subordinate sciences are necessary to the systematization (still systematization!) of our conceptions, by binding together our notions of the world in a set of propositions, which are coherent, and are a sufficiently correct representation of fact for our practical wants. Thirdly, a familiar knowledge of the invariable laws of natural phenomena is a great elementary lesson of submission, which, he is never weary of saying, is the first condition both of morality and of happiness. For these



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reasons, he would cause to be taught, from the age of fourteen to that of twenty-one, to all persons, rich and poor, girls or youths, a knowledge of the whole series of abstract sciences, such as none but the most highly instructed persons now possess, and of a far more systematic and philosophical character than is usually possessed even by them. (N.B.—They are to learn, during the same years, Greek and Latin, having previously, between the ages of seven and fourteen, learnt the five principal modern languages, to the degree necessary for reading, with due appreciation, the chief poetical compositions in each.) But they are to be taught all this, not only without encouraging, but stifling as much as possible, the examining and questioning spirit. The disposition which should be encouraged is that of receiving all on the authority of the teacher. The Positivist faith, even in its scientific part, is *la foi demonstrable*, but ought by no means to be *la foi toujours demontree*. The pupils have no business to be over-solicitous about proof. The teacher should not even present the proofs to them in a complete form, or as proofs. The object of instruction is to make them understand the doctrines themselves, perceive their mutual connexion, and form by means of them a consistent and *systematized* conception of nature. As for the demonstrations, it is rather desirable than otherwise that even theorists should forget them, retaining only the results. Among all the aberrations of scientific men, M. Comte thinks none greater than the pedantic anxiety they show for complete proof, and perfect rationalization of scientific processes. It ought to be enough that the doctrines afford an explanation of phenomena, consistent with itself and with known facts, and that the processes are justified by their fruits. This over-anxiety for proof, he complains, is breaking down, by vain scruples, the knowledge which seemed to have been attained; witness the present state of chemistry. The demand of proof for what has been accepted by Humanity, is itself a mark of “distrust, if not hostility, to the sacerdotal order” (the naivete of this would be charming, if it were not deplorable), and is a revolt against the traditions of the human race. So early had the new High Priest adopted the feelings and taken up the inheritance of the old. One of his favourite aphorisms is the strange one, that the living are more and more governed by the dead. As is not uncommon with him, he introduces the dictum in one sense, and uses it in another. What he at first means by it, is that as civilization advances, the sum of our possessions, physical and intellectual, is due in a decreasing proportion to ourselves, and in an increasing one to our progenitors. The use he makes of it is, that we should submit ourselves more and more implicitly to the authority of previous generations, and suffer ourselves less and less to doubt their judgment, or test by our own reason the grounds of their opinions. The unwillingness of the human intellect and conscience, in their present state of “anarchy,” to sign their own abdication, he calls “the insurrection of the living against the dead.” To this complexion has Positive Philosophy come at last!

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Worse, however, remains to be told. M. Comte selects a hundred volumes of science, philosophy, poetry, history, and general knowledge, which he deems a sufficient library for every positivist, even of the theoretic order, and actually proposes a systematic holocaust of books in general—it would almost seem of all books except these. Even that to which he shows most indulgence, poetry, except the very best, is to undergo a similar fate, with the reservation of select passages, on the ground that, poetry being intended to cultivate our instinct of ideal perfection, any kind of it that is less than the best is worse than none. This imitation of the error, we will call it the crime, of the early Christians—and in an exaggerated form, for even they destroyed only those writings of pagans or heretics which were directed against themselves—is the one thing in M. Comte's projects which merits real indignation. When once M. Comte has decided, all evidence on the other side, nay, the very historical evidence on which he grounded his decision, had better perish. When mankind have enlisted under his banner, they must burn their ships. There is, though in a less offensive form, the same overweening presumption in a suggestion he makes, that all species of animals and plants which are useless to man should be systematically rooted out. As if any one could presume to assert that the smallest weed may not, as knowledge advances, be found to have some property serviceable to man. When we consider that the united power of the whole human race cannot reproduce a species once eradicated—that what is once done, in the extirpation of races, can never be repaired; one can only be thankful that amidst all which the past rulers of mankind have to answer for, they have never come up to the measure of the great regenerator of Humanity; mankind have not yet been under the rule of one who assumes that he knows all there is to be known, and that when he has put himself at the head of humanity, the book of human knowledge may be closed.

Of course M. Comte does not make this assumption consistently. He does not imagine that he actually possesses all knowledge, but only that he is an infallible judge what knowledge is worth possessing. He does not believe that mankind have reached in all directions the extreme limits of useful and laudable scientific inquiry. He thinks there is a large scope for it still, in adding to our power over the external world, but chiefly in perfecting our own physical, intellectual, and moral nature. He holds that all our mental strength should be economized, for the pursuit of this object in the mode leading most directly to the end. With this view, some one problem should always be selected, the solution of which would be more important than any other to the interests of humanity, and upon this the entire intellectual resources of the theoretic mind should be concentrated, until it is either resolved, or has to be given up as insoluble:

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after which mankind should go on to another, to be pursued with similar exclusiveness. The selection of this problem of course rests with the sacerdotal order, or in other words, with the High Priest. We should then see the whole speculative intellect of the human race simultaneously at work on one question, by orders from above, as a French minister of public instruction once boasted that a million of boys were saying the same lesson during the same half-hour in every town and village of France. The reader will be anxious to know, how much better and more wisely the human intellect will be applied under this absolute monarchy, and to what degree this system of government will be preferable to the present anarchy, in which every theorist does what is intellectually right in his own eyes. M. Comte has not left us in ignorance on this point. He gives us ample means of judging. The Pontiff of Positivism informs us what problem, in his opinion, should be selected before all others for this united pursuit.

What this problem is, we must leave those who are curious on the subject to learn from the treatise itself. When they have done so, they will be qualified to form their own opinion of the amount of advantage which the general good of mankind would be likely to derive, from exchanging the present “dispersive speciality” and “intellectual anarchy” for the subordination of the intellect to the *coeur*, personified in a High Priest, prescribing a single problem for the undivided study of the theoretic mind.

We have given a sufficient general idea of M. Comte’s plan for the regeneration of human society, by putting an end to anarchy, and “systematizing” human thought and conduct under the direction of feeling. But an adequate conception will not have been formed of the height of his self-confidence, until something more has been told. Be it known, then, that M. Comte by no means proposes this new constitution of society for realization in the remote future. A complete plan of measures of transition is ready prepared, and he determines the year, before the end of the present century, in which the new spiritual and temporal powers will be installed, and the regime of our maturity will begin. He did not indeed calculate on converting to Positivism, within that time, more than a thousandth part of all the heads of families in Western Europe and its offshoots beyond the Atlantic. But he fixes the time necessary for the complete political establishment of Positivism at thirty-three years, divided into three periods, of seven, five, and twenty-one years respectively. At the expiration of seven, the direction of public education in France would be placed in M. Comte’s hands. In five years more, the Emperor Napoleon, or his successor, will resign his power to a provisional triumvirate, composed of three eminent proletaires of the positivist faith; for proletaires, though not fit for permanent rule, are the best agents of the



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transition, being the most free from the prejudices which are the chief obstacle to it. These rulers will employ the remaining twenty-one years in preparing society for its final constitution; and after duly installing the Spiritual Power, and effecting the decomposition of France into the seventeen republics before mentioned, will give over the temporal government of each to the normal dictatorship of the three bankers. A man may be deemed happy, but scarcely modest, who had such boundless confidence in his own powers of foresight, and expected so complete a triumph of his own ideas on the reconstitution of society within the possible limits of his lifetime. If he could live (he said) to the age of Pontenelle, or of Hobbes, or even of Voltaire, he should see all this realized, or as good as realized. He died, however, at sixty, without leaving any disciple sufficiently advanced to be appointed his successor. There is now a College, and a Director, of Positivism; but Humanity no longer possesses a High Priest.

What more remains to be said may be despatched more summarily. Its interest is philosophic rather than practical. In his four volumes of "Politique Positive," M. Comte revises and reelaborates the scientific and historical expositions of his first treatise. His object is to systematize (again to systematize) knowledge from the human or subjective point of view, the only one, he contends, from which a real synthesis is possible. For (he says) the knowledge attainable by us of the laws of the universe is at best fragmentary, and incapable of reduction to a real unity. An objective synthesis, the dream of Descartes and the best thinkers of old, is impossible. The laws of the real world are too numerous, and the manner of their working into one another too intricate, to be, as a general rule, correctly traced and represented by our reason. The only connecting principle in our knowledge is its relation to our wants, and it is upon that we must found our systematization. The answer to this is, first, that there is no necessity for an universal synthesis; and secondly, that the same arguments may be used against the possibility of a complete subjective, as of a complete objective systematization. A subjective synthesis must consist in the arrangement and co-ordination of all useful knowledge, on the basis of its relation to human wants and interests. But those wants and interests are, like the laws of the universe, extremely multifarious, and the order of preference among them in all their different gradations (for it varies according to the degree of each) cannot be cast into precise general propositions. M. Comte's subjective synthesis consists only in eliminating from the sciences everything that he deems useless, and presenting as far as possible every theoretical investigation as the solution of a practical problem. To this, however, he cannot consistently adhere; for, in every science, the theoretic truths are much more closely connected with one another than with the human purposes which they eventually serve, and can only be made to cohere in the intellect by being, to a great degree, presented as if they were truths of pure reason, irrespective of any practical application.



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There are many things eminently characteristic of M. Comte's second career, in this revision of the results of his first. Under the head of Biology, and for the better combination of that science with Sociology and Ethics, he found that he required a new system of Phrenology, being justly dissatisfied with that of Gall and his successors. Accordingly he set about constructing one *e priori*, grounded on the best enumeration and classification he could make of the elementary faculties of our intellectual, moral, and animal nature; to each of which he assigned an hypothetical place in the skull, the most conformable that he could to the few positive facts on the subject which he considered as established, and to the general presumption that functions which react strongly on one another must have their organs adjacent: leaving the localities avowedly to be hereafter verified, by anatomical and inductive investigation. There is considerable merit in this attempt, though it is liable to obvious criticisms, of the same nature as his own upon Gall. But the characteristic thing is, that while presenting all this as hypothesis waiting for verification, he could not have taken its truth more completely for granted if the verification had been made. In all that he afterwards wrote, every detail of his theory of the brain is as unhesitatingly asserted, and as confidently built upon, as any other doctrine of science. This is his first great attempt in the "Subjective Method," which, originally meaning only the subordination of the pursuit of truth to human uses, had already come to mean drawing truth itself from the fountain of his own mind. He had become, on the one hand, almost indifferent to proof, provided he attained theoretic coherency, and on the other, serenely confident that even the guesses which originated with himself could not but come out true.

There is one point in his later view of the sciences, which appears to us a decided improvement on his earlier. He adds to the six fundamental sciences of his original scale, a seventh under the name of Morals, forming the highest step of the ladder, immediately after Sociology: remarking that it might, with still greater propriety, be termed Anthropology, being the science of individual human nature, a study, when rightly understood, more special and complicated than even that of Society. For it is obliged to take into consideration the diversities of constitution and temperament (*la reaction cerebrale des visceres vegetatifs*) the effects of which, still very imperfectly understood, are highly important in the individual, but in the theory of society may be neglected, because, differing in different persons, they neutralize one another on the large scale. This is a remark worthy of M. Comte in his best days; and the science thus conceived is, as he says, the true scientific foundation of the art of Morals (and indeed of the art of human life), which, therefore, may, both philosophically and didactically, be properly combined with it.



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His philosophy of general history is recast, and in many respects changed; we cannot but say, greatly for the worse. He gives much greater development than before to the Fetishistic, and to what he terms the Theocratic, periods. To the Fetishistic view of nature he evinces a partiality, which appears strange in a Positive philosopher. But the reason is that Fetish-worship is a religion of the feelings, and not at all of the intelligence. He regards it as cultivating universal love: as a practical fact it cultivates much rather universal fear. He looks upon Fetishism as much more akin to Positivism than any of the forms of Theology, inasmuch as these consider matter as inert, and moved only by forces, natural and supernatural, exterior to itself: while Fetishism resembles Positivism in conceiving matter as spontaneously active, and errs only by not distinguishing activity from life. As if the superstition of the Fetishist consisted only in believing that the objects which produce the phaenomena of nature involuntarily, produce them voluntarily. The Fetishist thinks not merely that his Fetish is alive, but that it can help him in war, can cure him of diseases, can grant him prosperity, or afflict him with all the contrary evils. Therein consists the lamentable effect of Fetishism—its degrading and prostrating influence on the feelings and conduct, its conflict with all genuine experience, and antagonism to all real knowledge of nature.

M. Comte had also no small sympathy with the Oriental theocracies, as he calls the sacerdotal castes, who indeed often deserved it by their early services to intellect and civilization; by the aid they gave to the establishment of regular government, the valuable though empirical knowledge they accumulated, and the height to which they helped to carry some of the useful arts. M. Comte admits that they became oppressive, and that the prolongation of their ascendancy came to be incompatible with further improvement. But he ascribes this to their having arrogated to themselves the temporal government, which, so far as we have any authentic information, they never did. The reason why the sacerdotal corporations became oppressive, was because they were organized: because they attempted the “unity” and “systematization” so dear to M. Comte, and allowed no science and no speculation, except with their leave and under their direction. M. Comte’s sacerdotal order, which, in his system, has all the power that ever they had, would be oppressive in the same manner; with no variation but that which arises from the altered state of society and of the human mind.

M. Comte’s partiality to the theocracies is strikingly contrasted with his dislike of the Greeks, whom as a people he thoroughly detests, for their undue addiction to intellectual speculation, and considers to have been, by an inevitable fatality, morally sacrificed to the formation of a few great scientific intellects,—principally Aristotle, Archimedes, Apollonius, and Hipparchus. Any one who knows Grecian history as it can now be known, will be amazed at M. Comte’s travestie of it, in which the vulgarest historical prejudices are accepted and exaggerated, to illustrate the mischiefs of intellectual culture left to its own guidance.

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There is no need to analyze further M. Comte's second view of universal history. The best chapter is that on the Romans, to whom, because they were greater in practice than in theory, and for centuries worked together in obedience to a social sentiment (though only that of their country's aggrandizement), M. Comte is as favourably affected, as he is inimical to all but a small selection of eminent thinkers among the Greeks. The greatest blemish in this chapter is the idolatry of Julius Caesar, whom M. Comte regards as one of the most illustrious characters in history, and of the greatest practical benefactors of mankind. Caesar had many eminent qualities, but what he did to deserve such praise we are at a loss to discover, except subverting a free government: that merit, however, with M. Comte, goes a great way. It did not, in his former days, suffice to rehabilitate Napoleon, whose name and memory he regarded with a bitterness highly honourable to himself, and whose career he deemed one of the greatest calamities in modern history. But in his later writings these sentiments are considerably mitigated: he regards Napoleon as a more estimable "dictator" than Louis Philippe, and thinks that his greatest error was re-establishing the Academy of Sciences! That this should be said by M. Comte, and said of Napoleon, measures the depth to which his moral standard had fallen.

The last volume which he published, that on the Philosophy of Mathematics, is in some respects a still sadder picture of intellectual degeneracy than those which preceded it. After the admirable resume of the subject in the first volume of his first great work, we expected something of the very highest order when he returned to the subject for a more thorough treatment of it. But, being the commencement of a *Synthese Subjective*, it contains, as might be expected, a great deal that is much more subjective than mathematical. Nor of this do we complain: but we little imagined of what nature this subjective matter was to be. M. Comte here joins together the two ideas, which, of all that he has put forth, are the most repugnant to the fundamental principles of Positive Philosophy. One of them is that on which we have just commented, the assimilation between Positivism and Fetishism. The other, of which we took notice in a former article, was the "liberte facultative" of shaping our scientific conceptions to gratify the demands not solely of objective truth, but of intellectual and aesthetic suitability. It would be an excellent thing, M. Comte thinks, if science could be deprived of its *secheresse*, and directly associated with sentiment. Now it is impossible to prove that the external world, and the bodies composing it, are not endowed with feeling, and voluntary agency. It is therefore highly desirable that we should educate ourselves into imagining that they are. Intelligence it will not do to invest them with, for some distinction must be maintained between simple activity and life.



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But we may suppose that they feel what is done to them, and desire and will what they themselves do. Even intelligence, which we must deny to them in the present, may be attributed to them in the past. Before man existed, the earth, at that time an intelligent being, may have exerted "its physico-chemical activity so as to improve the astronomical order by changing its principal coefficients. Our planet may be supposed to have rendered its orbit less excentric, and thereby more habitable, by planning a long series of explosions, analogous to those from which, according to the best hypotheses, comets proceed. Judiciously reproduced, similar shocks may have rendered the inclination of the earth's axis better adapted to the future wants of the Grand Etre. A *fortiori* the Earth may have modified its own figure, which is only beyond our intervention because our spiritual ascendancy has not at its disposal a sufficient material force." The like may be conceived as having been done by each of the other planets, in concert, possibly, with the Earth and with one another. "In proportion as each planet improved its own condition, its life exhausted itself by excess of innervation; but with the consolation of rendering its self-devotion more efficacious, when the extinction of its special functions, first animal, and finally vegetative, reduced it to the universal attributes of feeling and activity." [25] This stuff, though he calls it fiction, he soon after speaks of as belief (croyance), to be greatly recommended, as at once satisfying our natural curiosity, and "perfecting our unity" (again unity!) "by supplying the gaps in our scientific notions with poetic fictions, and developing sympathetic emotions and aesthetic inspirations: the world being conceived as aspiring to second mankind in ameliorating the universal order under the impulse of the Grand Etre." And he obviously intends that we should be trained to make these fantastical inventions permeate all our associations, until we are incapable of conceiving the world and Nature apart from them, and they become equivalent to, and are in fact transformed into, real beliefs.

Wretched as this is, it is singularly characteristic of M. Comte's later mode of thought. A writer might be excused for introducing into an avowed work of fancy this dance of the planets, and conception of an animated Earth. If finely executed, he might even be admired for it. No one blames a poet for ascribing feelings, purposes, and human propensities to flowers. Because a conception might be interesting, and perhaps edifying, in a poem, M. Comte would have it imprinted on the inmost texture of every human mind in ordinary prose. If the imagination were not taught its prescribed lesson equally with the reason, where would be Unity? "It is important that the domain of fiction should become as *systematic* as that of demonstration, in order that their mutual harmony may be conformable to their respective destinations, both equally directed towards the continual increase of *unity*, personal and social." [26]



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Nor is it enough to have created the Grand Fetich (so he actually proposes to call the Earth), and to be able to include it and all concrete existence in our adoration along with the Grand Etre. It is necessary also to extend Positivist Fetishism to purely abstract existence; to “animate” the laws as well as the facts of nature. It is not sufficient to have made physics sentimental, mathematics must be made so too. This does not at first seem easy; but M. Comte finds the means of accomplishing it. His plan is, to make Space also an object of adoration, under the name of the Grand Milieu, and consider it as the representative of Fatality in general. “The final *unity* disposes us to cultivate sympathy by developing our gratitude to whatever serves the Grand Etre. It must dispose us to venerate the Fatality on which reposes the whole aggregate of our existence.” We should conceive this Fatality as having a fixed seat, and that seat must be considered to be Space, which should be conceived as possessing feeling, but not activity or intelligence. And in our abstract speculations we should imagine all our conceptions as located in free Space. Our images of all sorts, down to our geometrical diagrams, and even our ciphers and algebraic symbols, should always be figured to ourselves as written in space, and not on paper or any other material substance. M. Comte adds that they should be conceived as green on a white ground.

We cannot go on any longer with this. In spite of it all, the volume on mathematics is full of profound thoughts, and will be very suggestive to those who take up the subject after M. Comte. What deep meaning there is, for example, in the idea that the infinitesimal calculus is a conception analogous to the corpuscular hypothesis in physics; which last M. Comte has always considered as a logical artifice; not an opinion respecting matters of fact. The assimilation, as it seems to us, throws a flood of light on both conceptions; on the physical one still more than the mathematical. We might extract many ideas of similar, though none perhaps of equal, suggestiveness. But mixed with these, what pitiable *niaiseries*! One of his great points is the importance of the “moral and intellectual properties of numbers.” He cultivates a superstitious reverence for some of them. The first three are sacred, *les nombres sacres*: One being the type of all Synthesis, Two of all Combination, which he now says *is* always binary (in his first treatise he only said that we may usefully represent it to ourselves as being so), and Three of all Progression, which not only requires three terms, but as he now maintains, never ought to have any more. To these sacred numbers all our mental operations must be made, as far as possible, to adjust themselves. Next to them, he has a great partiality for the number seven; for these whimsical reasons: “Composed of two progressions followed by a synthesis, or of one progression between



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two couples, the number seven, coming next after the sum of the three sacred numbers, determines the largest group which we can distinctly imagine. Reciprocally, it marks the limit of the divisions which we can directly conceive in a magnitude of any kind." The number seven, therefore, must be foisted in wherever possible, and among other things, is to be made the basis of numeration, which is hereafter to be septimal instead of decimal: producing all the inconvenience of a change of system, not only without getting rid of, but greatly aggravating, the disadvantages of the existing one. But then, he says, it is absolutely necessary that the basis of numeration should be a prime number. All other people think it absolutely necessary that it should not, and regard the present basis as only objectionable in not being divisible enough. But M. Comte's puerile predilection for prime numbers almost passes belief. His reason is that they are the type of irreductibility: each of them is a kind of ultimate arithmetical fact. This, to any one who knows M. Comte in his later aspects, is amply sufficient. Nothing can exceed his delight in anything which says to the human mind, Thus far shalt thou go and no farther. If prime numbers are precious, doubly prime numbers are doubly so; meaning those which are not only themselves prime numbers, but the number which marks their place in the series of prime numbers is a prime number. Still greater is the dignity of trebly prime numbers; when the number marking the place of this second number is also prime. The number thirteen fulfils these conditions: it is a prime number, it is the seventh prime number, and seven is the fifth prime number. Accordingly he has an outrageous partiality to the number thirteen. Though one of the most inconvenient of all small numbers, he insists on introducing it everywhere.

These strange conceits are connected with a highly characteristic example of M. Comte's frenzy for regulation. He cannot bear that anything should be left unregulated: there ought to be no such thing as hesitation; nothing should remain arbitrary, for *l'arbitraire* is always favourable to egoism. Submission to artificial prescriptions is as indispensable as to natural laws, and he boasts that under the reign of sentiment, human life may be made equally, and even more, regular than the courses of the stars. But the great instrument of exact regulation for the details of life is numbers: fixed numbers, therefore, should be introduced into all our conduct. M. Comte's first application of this system was to the correction of his own literary style. Complaint had been made, not undeservedly, that in his first great work, especially in the latter part of it, the sentences and paragraphs were long, clumsy, and involved. To correct this fault, of which he was aware, he imposed on himself the following rules. No sentence was to exceed two lines of his manuscript, equivalent to five of print. No



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paragraph was to consist of more than seven sentences. He further applied to his prose writing the rule of French versification which forbids a *hiatus* (the concurrence of two vowels), not allowing it to himself even at the break between two sentences or two paragraphs; nor did he permit himself ever to use the same word twice, either in the same sentence or in two consecutive sentences, though belonging to different paragraphs: with the exception of the monosyllabic auxiliaries.[27] All this is well enough, especially the first two precepts, and a good way of breaking through a bad habit. But M. Comte persuaded himself that any arbitrary restriction, though in no way emanating from, and therefore necessarily disturbing, the natural order and proportion of the thoughts, is a benefit in itself, and tends to improve style. If it renders composition vastly more difficult, he rejoices at it, as tending to confine writing to superior minds. Accordingly, in the *Synthese Subjective*, he institutes the following "plan for all compositions of importance." "Every volume really capable of forming a distinct treatise" should consist of "seven chapters, besides the introduction and the conclusion; and each of these should be composed of three parts." Each third part of a chapter should be divided into "seven sections, each composed of seven groups of sentences, separated by the usual break of line. Normally formed, the section offers a central group of seven sentences, preceded and followed by three groups of five: the first section of each part reduces to three sentences three of its groups, symmetrically placed; the last section gives seven sentences to each of its extreme groups. These rules of composition make prose approach to the regularity of poetry, when combined with my previous reduction of the maximum length of a sentence to two manuscript or five printed lines, that is, 250 letters." "Normally constructed, great poems consist of thirteen cantos, decomposed into parts, sections, and groups like my chapters, saving the complete equality of the groups and of the sections." "This difference of structure between volumes of poetry and of philosophy is more apparent than real, for the introduction and the conclusion of a poem should comprehend six of its thirteen cantos," leaving, therefore, the cabalistic number seven for the body of the poem. And all this regulation not being sufficiently meaningless, fantastic, and oppressive, he invents an elaborate system for compelling each of his sections and groups to begin with a letter of the alphabet, determined beforehand, the letters being selected so as to compose words having "a synthetic or sympathetic signification," and as close a relation as possible to the section or part to which they are appropriated.

Others may laugh, but we could far rather weep at this melancholy decadence of a great intellect. M. Comte used to reproach his early English admirers with maintaining the "conspiracy of silence" concerning his later performances. The reader can now judge whether such reticence is not more than sufficiently explained by tenderness for his fame, and a conscientious fear of bringing undeserved discredit on the noble speculations of his early career.



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M. Comte was accustomed to consider Descartes and Leibnitz as his principal precursors, and the only great philosophers (among many thinkers of high philosophic capacity) in modern times. It was to their minds that he considered his own to bear the nearest resemblance. Though we have not so lofty an opinion of any of the three as M. Comte had, we think the assimilation just: these were, of all recorded thinkers, the two who bore most resemblance to M. Comte. They were like him in earnestness, like him, though scarcely equal to him, in confidence in themselves; they had the same extraordinary power of concatenation and co-ordination; they enriched human knowledge with great truths and great conceptions of method; they were, of all great scientific thinkers, the most consistent, and for that reason often the most absurd, because they shrank from no consequences, however contrary to common sense, to which their premises appeared to lead. Accordingly their names have come down to us associated with grand thoughts, with most important discoveries, and also with some of the most extravagantly wild and ludicrously absurd conceptions and theories which ever were solemnly propounded by thoughtful men. "We think M. Comte as great as either of these philosophers, and hardly more extravagant. Were we to speak our whole mind, we should call him superior to them: though not intrinsically, yet by the exertion of equal intellectual power in a more advanced state of human preparation; but also in an age less tolerant of palpable absurdities, and to which those he has committed, if not in themselves greater, at least appear more ridiculous.

### THE END.

### FOOTNOTES:

[1] See the Chapter on Efficient Causes in Reid's "Essays on the Active Powers," which is avowedly grounded on Newton's ideas.

[2] Mr Herbert Spencer, who also distinguishes between abstract and concrete sciences, employs the terms in a different sense from that explained above. He calls a science abstract when its truths are merely ideal; when, like the truths of geometry, they are not exactly true of real things—or, like the so-called law of inertia (the persistence in direction and velocity of a motion once impressed) are "involved" in experience but never actually seen in it, being always more or less completely frustrated. Chemistry and biology he includes, on the contrary, among concrete sciences, because chemical combinations and decompositions, and the physiological action of tissues, do actually take place (as our senses testify) in the manner in which the scientific propositions state them to take place. We will not discuss the logical or philological propriety of either use of the terms abstract and concrete, in which twofold point of view very few of the numerous acceptations of these words are entirely defensible: but of the two distinctions M. Comte's



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answers to by far the deepest and most vital difference. Mr Spencer's is open to the radical objection, that it classifies truths not according to their subject-matter or their mutual relations, but according to an unimportant difference in the manner in which we come to know them. Of what consequence is it that the law of inertia (considered as an exact truth) is not generalized from our direct perceptions, but inferred by combining with the movements which we see, those which we should see if it were not for the disturbing causes? In either case we are equally certain that it *is* an exact truth: for every dynamical law is perfectly fulfilled even when it seems to be counteracted. There must, we should think, be many truths in physiology (for example) which are only known by a similar indirect process; and Mr Spencer would hardly detach these from the body of the science, and call them abstract and the remainder concrete.

[3] *Systeme de Politique Positive*, ii. 36.

[4] The strongest case which Mr Spencer produces of a scientifically ascertained law, which, though belonging to a later science, was necessary to the scientific formation of one occupying an earlier place in M. Comte's series, is the law of the accelerating force of gravity; which M. Comte places in Physics, but without which the Newtonian theory of the celestial motions could not have been discovered, nor could even now be proved. This fact, as is judiciously remarked by M. Littré, is not valid against the plan of M. Comte's classification, but discloses a slight error in the detail. M. Comte should not have placed the laws of terrestrial gravity under Physics. They are part of the general theory of gravitation, and belong to astronomy. Mr Spencer has hit one of the weak points in M. Comte's scientific scale; weak however only because left unguarded. Astronomy, the second of M. Comte's abstract sciences, answers to his own definition of a concrete science. M. Comte however was only wrong in overlooking a distinction. There *is* an abstract science of astronomy, namely, the theory of gravitation, which would equally agree with and explain the facts of a totally different solar system from the one of which our earth forms a part. The actual facts of our own system, the dimensions, distances, velocities, temperatures, physical constitution, &c., of the sun, earth, and planets, are properly the subject of a concrete science, similar to natural history; but the concrete is more inseparably united to the abstract science than in any other case, since the few celestial facts really accessible to us are nearly all required for discovering and proving the law of gravitation as an universal property of bodies, and have therefore an indispensable place in the abstract science as its fundamental data.



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[5] The only point at which the general principle of the series fails in its application, is the subdivision of Physics; and there, as the subordination of the different branches scarcely exists, their order is of little consequence. Thermology, indeed, is altogether an exception to the principle of decreasing generality, heat, as Mr Spencer truly says being as universal as gravitation. But the place of Thermology is marked out, within certain narrow limits, by the ends of the classification, though not by its principle. The desideratum is, that every science should precede those which cannot be scientifically constitute or rationally studied until it is known. It is as a means to this end, that the arrangement of the phaenomena in the order of their dependence on one another is important. Now, though heat is as universal a phaenomenon as any which external nature presents, its laws do not affect, in any manner important to us, the phaenomena of Astronomy, and operate in the other branches of Physics only as slight modifying agencies, the consideration of which may be postponed to a rather advanced stage. But the phaenomena of Chemistry and Biology depend on them often for their very existence. The ends of the classification require therefore that Thermology should precede Chemistry and Biology, but do not demand that it should be thrown farther back. On the other hand, those same ends, in another point of view, require that it should be subsequent to Astronomy, for reasons not of doctrine but of method: Astronomy being the best school of the true art of interpreting Nature, by which Thermology profits like other sciences, but which it was ill adapted to originate.

[6] The philosophy of the subject is perhaps nowhere so well expressed as in the "Systeme de Politique Positive" (iii. 41). "Concu logiquement, l'ordre suivant lequel nos principales theories accomplissent l'evolution fondamentale resulte necessairement de leur dependance mutuelle. Toutes les sciences peuvent, sans doute, etre ebauchees a la fois: leur usage pratique exige meme cette culture simultanee. Mais elle ne peut concerner que les inductions propres a chaque classe de speculations. Or cet essor inductif ne saurait fournir des principes suffisants qu'envers les plus simples etudes. Partout ailleurs, ils ne peuvent etre etablis qu'en subordonnant chaque genre d'inductions scientifiques a l'ensemble des deductions emanees des domaines moins compliques, et des-lors moins dependants. Ainsi nos diverses theories reposent dogmatiquement les unes sur les autres, suivant un ordre invariable, qui doit regler historiquement leur avenement decisif, les plus independantes ayant toujours du se developper plus tot."



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[7] "Science," says Mr Spencer in his "Genesis," "while purely inductive is purely qualitative.... All quantitative prevision is reached deductively; induction can achieve only qualitative prevision." Now, if we remember that the very first accurate quantitative law of physical phaenomena ever established, the law of the accelerating force of gravity, was discovered and proved by Galileo partly at least by experiment; that the quantitative laws on which the whole theory of the celestial motions is grounded, were generalized by Kepler from direct comparison of observations; that the quantitative law of the condensation of gases by pressure, the law of Boyle and Mariotte, was arrived at by direct experiment; that the proportional quantities in which every known substance combines chemically with every other, were ascertained by innumerable experiments, from which the general law of chemical equivalents, now the ground of the most exact quantitative previsions, was an inductive generalization; we must conclude that Mr Spencer has committed himself to a general proposition, which a very slight consideration of truths perfectly known to him would have shown to be unsustainable.

Again, in the very pamphlet in which Mr Spencer defends himself against the supposition of being a disciple of M. Comte ("The Classification of the Sciences," p. 37), he speaks of "M. Comte's adherent, Mr Buckle." Now, except in the opinion common to both, that history may be made a subject of science, the speculations of these two thinkers are not only different, but run in different channels, M. Comte applying himself principally to the laws of evolution common to all mankind, Mr Buckle almost exclusively to the diversities: and it may be affirmed without presumption, that they neither saw the same truths, nor fell into the same errors, nor defended their opinions, either true or erroneous, by the same arguments. Indeed, it is one of the surprising things in the case of Mr Buckle as of Mr Spencer, that being a man of kindred genius, of the same wide range of knowledge, and devoting himself to speculations of the same kind, he profited so little by M. Comte.

These oversights prove nothing against the general accuracy of Mr Spencer's acquirements. They are mere lapses of inattention, such as thinkers who attempt speculations requiring that vast multitudes of facts should be kept in recollection at once, can scarcely hope always to avoid.

[8] We refer particularly to the mystical metaphysics connected with the negative sign, imaginary quantities, infinity and infinitesimals, &c, all cleared up and put on a rational footing in the highly philosophical treatises of Professor De Morgan.

[9] Those who wish to see this idea followed out, are referred to "A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive." It is not irrelevant to state that M. Comte, soon after the publication of that work, expressed, both in a letter (published in M. Littré's volume) and in print, his high approval of it (especially of the Inductive part) as a real contribution to the construction of the Positive Method. But we cannot discover that he was indebted to it for a single idea, or that it influenced, in the smallest particular, the course of his subsequent speculations.



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[10] The force, however, of this last consideration has been much weakened by the progress of discovery since M. Comte left off studying chemistry; it being now probable that most if not all substances, even elementary, are susceptible of *allotropic* forms; as in the case of oxygen and ozone, the two forms of phosphorus, &c.

[11] Thus; by considering prussic acid as a compound of hydrogen and cyanogen rather than of hydrogen and the elements of cyanogen (carbon and nitrogen), it is assimilated to a whole class of acid compounds between hydrogen and other substances, and a reason is thus found for its agreeing in their acid properties.

[12] According to Sir William Hamilton, as many as six; but numerical precision in such matters is out of the question, and it is probable that different minds have the power in different degrees.

[13] Or, as afterwards corrected by him, the appetites and emotions, the active capacities, and the intellectual faculties; "le coeur," "le caractere," and "l'esprit."

[14] M. Littré, who, though a warm admirer, and accepting the position of a disciple of M. Comte, is singularly free from his errors, makes the equally ingenious and just remark, that Political Economy corresponds in social science to the theory of the nutritive functions in biology, which M. Comte, with all good physiologists, thinks it not only permissible but a great and fundamental improvement to treat, in the first place, separately, as the necessary basis of the higher branches of the science: although the nutritive functions can no more be withdrawn *in fact* from the influence of the animal and human attributes, than the economical phaenomena of society from that of the political and moral.

[15] Indeed his claim to be the creator of Sociology does not extend to this branch of the science; on the contrary, he, in a subsequent work, expressly declares that the real founder of it was Aristotle, by whom the theory of the conditions of social existence was carried as far towards perfection as was possible in the absence of any theory of Progress. Without going quite this length, we think it hardly possible to appreciate too highly the merit of those early efforts, beyond which little progress had been made, until a very recent period, either in ethical or in political science.

[16] It is due to them both to say, that he continued to express, in letters which have been published, a high opinion of her, both morally and intellectually; and her persistent and strong concern for his interests and his fame is attested both by M. Littré and by his own correspondence.

[17] "Of the Classification of the Sciences," pp. 37, 38.



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[18] In the case of Egypt we admit that there may be cited against us the authority of Plato, in whose *Politicus* it is said that the king of Egypt must be a member of the priestly caste, or if by usurpation a member of any other caste acquired the sovereignty he must be initiated with the sacerdotal order. But Plato was writing of a state of things which already belonged to the past; nor have we any assurance that his information on Egyptian institutions was authentic and accurate. Had the king been necessarily or commonly a member of the priestly order, it is most improbable that the careful Herodotus, of whose comprehensive work an entire book was devoted to a minute account of Egypt and its institutions, and who collected his information from Egyptian priests in the country itself, would have been ignorant of a part so important, and tending so much to exalt the dignity of the priesthood, who were much more likely to affirm it falsely to Plato than to withhold the knowledge of it if true from Herodotus. Not only is Herodotus silent respecting any such law or custom, but he thinks it needful to mention that in one particular instance the king (by name Sethos) was a priest, which he would scarcely have done if this had been other than an exceptional case. It is likely enough that a king of Egypt would learn the hieratic character, and would not suffer any of the mysteries of law or religion which were in the keeping of the priests to be withheld from him; and this was very probably all the foundation which existed for the assertion of the Eleatic stranger in Plato's dialogue.

[19] Mill, *History of British India*, book ii. chap. iii.

[20] At a somewhat later period M. Comte drew up what he termed a Positivist Calendar, in which every day was dedicated to some benefactor of humanity (generally with the addition of a similar but minor luminary, to be celebrated in the room of his principal each bissextile year). In this no kind of human eminence, really useful, is omitted, except that which is merely negative and destructive. On this principle (which is avowed) the French *philosophes* as such are excluded, those only among them being admitted who, like Voltaire and Diderot, had claims to admission on other grounds: and the Protestant religious reformers are left out entirely, with the curious exception of George Fox—who is included, we presume, in consideration of his Peace principles.

[21] He goes still further and deeper in a subsequent work. "L'art ramene doucement a la realite les contemplations trop abstraites du theoricien, tandis qu'il pousse noblement le praticien aux speculations desinteressees." *Systeme de Politique Positive*, i. 287.

[22] 1. *Systeme de Politique Positive, ou Traite de Sociologie, instituant la Religion de l'Humanite*. 4 vols. 8vo. Paris: 1851—1854.

2. *Catechisme Positiviste, ou Sommaire Exposition de la Religion Universelle, en onze Entretiens Systematiques entre une Femme et un Pretre de l'Humanite*. 1 vol. 12mo. Paris: 1852.

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3. *Appel aux Conservateurs*. Paris: 1855 (brochure).

4. *Synthese Subjective, ou Systeme Universel des Conceptions propres a l'Etat Normal de l'Humanite*. Tome Premier, contenant le Systeme de Logique Positive, ou Traite de Philosophie Mathematique. 8vo. Paris: 1856.

5. *Auguste Comte et la Philosophie Positive*. Par E. LITTRE. 1 vol. 8vo. Paris: 1863.

6. *Exposition Abregee et Populaire de la Philosophie et de la Religion Positives*. PAR CELESTIN DE BLIGNIERES, ancien eleve de l'Ecole Polytechnique. 1 vol. 12mo. Paris: 1857.

7. *Notice sur l'Oeuvre et sur la Vie d'Auguste Comte*. Par le DOCTEUR ROBINET, son Medecin, et l'un de ses treize Executeurs Testamentaires. 1 vol. 8vo. Paris: 1860.

[23] *Systeme de Politique Positive*, iv. 100.

[24] See Sir John Herschel's *Outlines of Astronomy*, Sec. 319.

[25] *Synthese Subjective*, pp. 10, 11.

[26] *Synthese Subjective*, pp. 11, 12.