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JOURNAL OF
THE TRANSACTIONS
OF
The Victoria Institute,
OR,
Philosophical Society of Great Britain.

EDITED BY THE HONORARY SECRETARY,
CAPTAIN F. W. H. PETRIE, F.G.S., &c.

VOL. XXVIII.



LONDON:

(Published by the Institute, 8, Adelphi Terrace, Charing Cross, W.C.)

INDIA: W. THACKER & Co. UNITED STATES: G. T. PUTNAM'S SONS, N. Y.

AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND: G. ROBERTSON & Co. LIM.

CANADA: DAWSON BROS., *Montreal*.

S. AFRICA: JUTA & Co., *Cape Town*.

PARIS: GALIGNANI.

1896.

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ORDINARY MEETING.*

D. HOWARD, ESQ., F.C.S., D.L., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following Elections were announced :—

ASSOCIATES :—The Right Rev. the Bishop of Honduras, Belize ; Rev. F. W. Breed, India ; Colonel J. Levering, U.S.V., United States ; D. Wright, Esq., Yorkshire.

The following paper was then read by the author :—

THE PHILOSOPHY OF AUGUSTE COMTE RE-CONSIDERED. By J. W. SLATER, Esq., F.C.S., F.E.S.

SOME forty years ago the British public was told of a brilliant and vigorous writer, of one who was proclaimed to be the greatest thinker of modern times—a man whose doctrines were to be to the nineteenth century something more than that which Bacon's were to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The world heard—some in undisguised alarm, some with eager hope and others with critical reserve. My special task to-day is, leaving social and political speculations to more qualified hands, to inquire what has been the outcome of this positive philosophy as far as Science is concerned.

It is well known that Comte did not intend or attempt to furnish in his great work a series of treatises on the various sciences—a task for which he was scarcely qualified. He sought to display them in their mutual relations as a coherent hierarchy arranged on natural principles. He sketched their history, their present position, and in some sort their future prospects. He expounded their methods,

* 6th of 30th Session.

their leading doctrines, and the part which each has to play in the education of the individuals and of the human race.

No one can dispute either the difficulty or the importance of the undertaking which, if performed aright, must have given a powerful impulse to every science and been of incalculable service to every inquirer.

To ascertain how Comte can be held successful in the fulfilment of his task we must examine his three leading conceptions:—

He regarded all the sciences, physical and moral, as branches of one grand discipline, to be investigated on one and the same method. The originality of this conception is not very plain. For a couple of centuries the current of thought had been decidedly setting in this direction. Still no one, as far as I am aware, had formulated the idea with equal distinctness.

The second fundamental conception is put forth as the supreme law of human development:—"There are but three phases of intellectual evolution, for the individual as well as for the mass—the theological (supernatural, or it might be said the personifying), the metaphysical and the positive. In the first of these three stages man seeks the origins and the final causes of everything. He supposes all surrounding objects animated or sentient. It is curious, I may here remark in passing, how such an ascription of life and consciousness to all matter is again creeping in even among men of high culture.

In the metaphysical phase phenomena are referred to abstractions, "essences" or entities, whilst in the ultimate or positive phase the mind confines itself to a quest into the laws of phenomena, superadding nothing to what is actually observed, and dismissing noumena and causes as beyond human scope.

It cannot be denied that many instances can be found which seem to agree beautifully with this law. Thus the explosive gas which sometimes shatters a mine and scorches or buries the unfortunate workmen was at one time supposed to be an angry demon, a gnome or cobold, jealous of human intrusion into his treasure houses. The fact that the ordinary pressure of the atmosphere counterbalances a column of 32 feet of water, and no more, was explained by the dictum that nature "abhorred a vacuum" for the first 32 feet, but not beyond.

Still on a general and careful analysis of the rise and progress of science we fail to find the stages as above indicated. Mr. Herbert Spencer after a careful examination of the genesis of science, rejects the Comtean phases as not specially significant. It has been questioned whether mathematics can have had a supernatural or a metaphysical stage at all. Liebig was unable to trace the three stages in the history of chemistry.

If we refer to the earliest known documents concerning that science, such as the *Book of the Balance of Wisdom* (written about A.D. 1120), we find the records of calm experimental inquiry, distinctly "positive" in its spirit and free from anything mystical or fantastic. The strange superstitions and delusions with which we are so familiar under the name of alchemy seem to have attached themselves parasitically to the science at a later date.

The "Papyrus Ebers," which dates from the sixteenth century B.C., and which, though primarily medical in its aims, contains such information on the chemistry, the physics and the biology of those early days, is free from hocus pocus and gibberish. Sorcery was forbidden as strictly as in the Pentateuch, and the alchemistic magi were punished with death under Rameses III. All persons who wish to learn for themselves that the alleged theological and metaphysical phases of chemistry are illusory, may refer to Berthelot's work, on *Alchemy*, based on a careful scrutiny of documents which have been preserved in national and university libraries.

We have next to turn to Comte's third fundamental conception, his classification of the sciences. Here we find shortcomings of grave importance. He takes his stand on "the degree of generality of the corresponding phenomena, the extent of their complication, their relative states of speculative perfection and their mutual dependence. Thus he arranges the abstract sciences in the following series:—mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and sociology. Here we find ourselves on doubtful ground. It is plain that the sciences which come later in the rank are indebted to the earlier ones both for methods and for facts, and that the more frequently the more closely they approximate. But Comte forgot that there is also indebtedness in the opposite direction. Astronomy is beholden to physics and chemistry for methods of investigating the temperature, the nature and in some cases even the motion

of the heavenly bodies. In proof we need merely refer to the spectroscope, the indications of which would be utterly unmeaning had we no knowledge of physics and chemistry.

Chemistry is now known to be largely indebted to biology. The latter science aids us in determining the molecular constitution of compounds. We cannot understand the phenomena of fermentation and putrefaction, the formation of nitrates and of ammonia without a knowledge of the vital action of micro-organisms.

Such cases of mutual obligation are sure to become more abundantly known the more our researches are extended.

Further, the phenomena of physics are quite as general as those of astronomy, since we recognise the heavenly bodies only by the light which they emit or reflect. It is also difficult to conceive that we can anywhere have matter acted upon by certain of the forms of energy, such as heat, light, or electricity, without the possibility of chemical changes. Chemical phenomena are thus found to be no less general than those which form the subject matter of astronomy and of physics.

Comte's classification of the respective branches of physics is founded on the same principles which we have mentioned above, and it is by no means happy. He arranges in a linear series the disciplines which treat of gravitation, heat, sound, light and electricity. Now it must surely be admitted at once that the phenomena of light and electricity, the former of which agencies travels through the depths of space, whilst the latter probably pervades all matter, are vastly more general than those of sound. But the classification of the sciences in a linear series, on any principles, will be found practicable only by dint of arbitrary assumptions and by the neglect of obvious considerations. Comte certainly rejects the so-called imponderables. He does not admit, but neither does he deny the existence of the "ether" whose undulations affect us as light. Some credit may be awarded to him for taking this stand, if we remember that at the time when the *Philosophie Positive* was written (1830-1842), many French thinkers still clung on in an unhappy devotion to the conception of "caloric" as a substantive entity.

Electricity, according to Comte, forms a natural transition to chemistry. Yet the relations of chemistry and heat are now found, thanks to the labours of Berthelot and Thomson,

to be at least equally intimate. Indeed Comte seems to have little foreseen how physics and chemistry would approximate and almost coalesce in the half century succeeding the date of his first volume. It is no longer safe to say "physics treats of masses acting at sensible distances; chemistry treats of molecules acting at insensible distances." Even Comte's prophet, G. H. Lewes, admits that "physical phenomena are often molecular" (*Philosophy of the Sciences*, p. 96).

In the *Philosophie Positive* (vol. iii, 103-9) Comte explicitly alleges that dualism requires to be universally received in chemistry, even as regards organic compounds. G. H. Lewes considers as recently as 1853 that chemical philosophy is daily advancing more and more to a "recognition of the necessary dualism of all chemical combinations" (*Philosophy of the Sciences*, p. 145). Here then we have a lack of insight into the future prospects of a science scarcely less striking than he displays when he refuses to admit the mutability of organic species. It is perfectly true that in 1838 dualism was still in the ascendant and was taught in all the universities. But signs were not wanting which should have been sufficient for a man of such penetrating insight as Comte is represented by his admirers. Men of the most every-day stamp can admit a change when it has been formally introduced. But from our spiritual pioneers we expect the power of detecting its earliest streaks of dawn.

We come next to biology, the doctrine of life, which Comte unfortunately makes to include psychology. Here he is not followed either by his prophet, G. H. Lewes, nor by his admirer—in many respects—John Stuart Mill. Both these writers justly contend that should mind be ultimately proved to be merely a function of the nerve-centres, the successions and co-existences of mental states are capable of being directly studied without reference to the cerebral changes which may be their immediate antecedents. Even if life were simply a "play of matter," thought is a higher phase of life, displaying special phenomena, and admitting—or rather requiring—special study.

Comte rather inconsistently gives a definition of life, rejecting the irrational attempt of Bichat, preferring that of De Blainville, "Life is the twofold internal movement of composition and decomposition at once general and continuous." This definition is faulty, as it does not include

the central idea of reproduction, and it may further be pronounced not more intelligible than the thing to be defined.

Comte regards tissues as being for the animal and the plant what molecules are for chemical compounds. He objects to the life-monads of the physio-philosophers. On cells he has nothing to say. But it must be particularly and regretfully noted that he does not accept the views of his great countryman Lamarck or of Darwin, but regards organic species as fixed and permanent. He does not, indeed, tell us that species have existed for ever, or came into being spontaneously. Nor does he assert that they were ever created such as we now find them. Creation, indeed, would prove a difficult task for Comte's newly invented God, "human nature in the abstract." The subject is in fact shelved, and thus a great and most interesting portion of the science of life is renounced. The "Positivists," indeed, raise the plea that science does not legitimately deal with origins. Be it so: Evolution is the name of a mode not of beginning, but of continuance.

Darwin nowhere attempts to explain the origin of life, the passage from the inorganic to the organic.

How much Comte has missed by failing to appreciate the doctrine of evolution it is not easy to sum up. Acting as he did, he has betrayed a proof of deficiency in profound philosophic insight, in the spirit which foresees and foretells the future track of discovery. More than this, he has thrown his weight into the scale of the reactionary school of Cuvier. With, I believe, the single exception of G. H. Lewes, all the leading positivists in England and France still think it incumbent upon them not merely to reject, but to vituperate evolution. M. Robin and Mr. Oswald Dawson denounce Darwin with the utmost volubility. Whether this is vindictive jealousy springing from the fact that evolution is a brilliant success and positivism a signal failure I have no means of ascertaining.

We may next come to a consideration of Comte's phrenology. Rejecting the threadbare craniological system devised by Gall, he still adopts the principle that the brain consists of a number of distinct organs, each the seat of some special faculty. But he allots to each faculty its seat, not in obedience to comparative observations, but arbitrarily, *i.e.*, according to Comte's notions of where they ought to be fixed. He leaves to anatomists the task of discovering evidence in

support of his system. So far, we need scarcely say, such evidence has not been forthcoming. Hence Comte's phrenology has to encounter all the difficulties which beset the system of Gall without its *a posteriori* evidence. The two are not in harmony. It must, however, be noticed that Comte does not fall into the error of denying to the lower animals the possession of the moral sentiments, despite the evidence of such sentiments in their conduct and despite the fact that the brains, *e.g.*, of the anthropoid apes do not differ from our own in the manner and to the extent which this assumption would involve.

In that Comte has thrown no novel, guiding light upon the philosophy of life, but by rejecting the principle of evolution he has done his best to extend and perpetuate darkness.

We must now turn to the final member of Comte's hierarchy, Sociology, or Social Science. He certainly proclaimed that human society has its inherent laws, not depending upon the caprice of rulers or statesmen, or upon the noisy utterances of ochlocratic stump-orators, laws capable of being discovered by methods similar to those which we are successfully following in chemistry or in biology. Few competent judges will here join issue. Yet I do not find that he anywhere recognises the necessity of studying the simpler societies of the lower animals—such as ants, rooks, etc.—before proceeding to examine the more complicated polity of our own species. But has Comte really placed in our hands any distinct clue capable of being followed up? Are we taking any steps towards constituting the promised science? Look, for instance, at our late "Social Science Congress." Its transactions were filled not so much with attempts to reduce social phenomena under laws capable of verification and leading us to a prevision of facts not yet observed, as with so many disconnected declamations on every possible subject that can be construed as having any bearing on human society. But is Comte to be blamed for this failure? By no means: but that such shall we say failures can still be enacted in the name of social science shows that no definite plan has yet been drawn out.

On no ground has Comte been more strongly censured and at the same time with less justice than anent his rejection of "political economy." He condemns it as the outcome of a merely critical and negative philosophy, isolating itself from the whole to which it should rightfully belong, and seeking to

take its place. In his rejection of this unhappy discipline he seems to me, however, to have been for once guided by a correct principle. For what is, after all, political economy? Simply the study of man viewed solely as a producer, accumulator, distributor and consumer of wealth, all his other functions being temporarily set aside. That such disregard is temporarily justifiable as a scientific artifice for the sake of convenience in study cannot be contested. But how if this regard is continued and carried into practice? Let me take a parallel case. Suppose that nothing were known concerning the anatomy and physiology of man, and that the art of healing had been conducted solely upon clinical principles, practitioners observing that when certain symptoms were observed benefit was obtained by the use of this or the other remedy or appliance. Under such circumstances, if a body of men came to the conclusion that a knowledge of the human system and of its various functions was desirable, it would be quite legitimate for them to confine themselves for the present to the study of some one set of organs. They might, *e.g.*, select in this manner the respiratory apparatus and its laws of action. The truths they might thus ascertain would, if rightly applied, prove of great value in medical practice. But suppose that after having reached a moderately accurate knowledge of respiration and its organs, they declined to investigate other functions of the body, and attempted to heal the sick in the sole light of their recent studies, declaring, tacitly at least, that so long as the lungs of a patient were kept in healthy action, the digestive and circulatory organs, and even the nerve centres, might safely be neglected, the result would be quackery of a very dangerous type. But *mutatis mutandis* this is precisely what the economists do in attempting to reduce their fragment of a science to practice. Comte felt this, and hence his condemnation of the Economists was legitimate. I cannot help here expressing my regret that the section of the British Association which professes to deal with Statistics and Political Economy is still allowed to exist. It verges to a dangerous degree upon party politics, and at the best it merely does work which had much better be left to Chambers of Commerce.

Comte proclaimed that the "military and ecclesiastical régime," as he called it, of the present was to give place to an industrial and scientific organisation, the workman taking the place of the soldier and the savant that of the priest.

Never was there a more unfortunate prophecy, for never has the world known such enormous armies as those of the present day. It does not appear whether he ever asked himself if industrialism is or should be the final haven of the human race. He never sought if it were possible to point out a manufacturing and commercial city, province, or country where wealth, whether for the few or the many, has not been bought at the price of personal degradation. Whether industry can ever be so reorganised as not to yield these bitter fruits,—whether it will ever allow man the quietude and the leisure necessary for his full development Comte does not say.

We can scarcely pronounce him a friend to science. Not only was he no discoverer or originator in any department; in chemistry and biology his influence was distinctly retrograde.

He certainly assigns to philosophers, in his sense of the word, a position something like that commonly held by the priesthood. But he subordinates Science to Emotionalism. Hence we find his followers, almost to a man, taking part in “anti-movements,” or even, in their own language, “setting bounds to the inroads of Science.”

Comte held “science a futile, frivolous pursuit, unworthy of greater respect than a game of chess unless its issue be in some enlarged conception of man’s life and destiny.” In other words he did not feel that love of abstract truth for its own sake which actuates our great investigators. He was more of a moralist than a scientist, and his morals we may estimate from the fact that he deserted his faithful and devoted wife and attached himself to the wife of a convict!

The *Philosophie Positive* can scarcely be held to form an epoch in the spiritual history of the world. In comparison with evolutionism it appears barren in results of value. Just as the advocates of peace at any price have before now involved us in war at a very high price—just as the philanthropist often finds that he has been multiplying misery, or at best transferring the rights of the prudent to the reckless—so Comte and his disciples, in the hope of uniting all intellectual activity into one harmonious whole, have succeeded in generating a new heresy and a new intolerance.

I hope I have not expressed myself with any unjustifiable bitterness, but as, at the instigation of the late G. H. Lewes, I undertook a most careful study of Comte’s work,

expending one of the best years of my life without gleaning an idea or a hint of any service, I cannot but regard him as a false prophet. Into his *bogus* religion, the worship of human nature in the abstract, I do not enter. It is too ridiculous for discussion.

The CHAIRMAN (D. HOWARD, Esq., D.L.).—We have to thank the author for his very interesting *résumé* of Comtian philosophy. Many modern writers know very little about it; but with those who are old enough to remember the fascinating writings of G. H. Lewes on philosophy, to whom it really did appear as if in this Comtian philosophy there was abundant reality and great promise, it is well to look back and find how entirely what was accepted by many men of the most superior minds as being (even apart from the substitution of his philosophy for religion, but from a philosophical point of view) almost a revelation, has failed to produce any result. I think there is a lesson of humility in this with regard to the acceptance of new theories which have not had time fully to test themselves. It is fair to claim for any new theory of philosophy a sort—if I may use the word in its literal and philological sense—of prophetic power. When we consider how the ideas of Newton have worked into almost every department of modern science without alteration, it demands our admiration. The only great alteration that has been made is the undulatory theory instead of emission of light, which is, after all, a comparatively small matter. Again, if we take the more modern developments of science and the great developments of human thought, the Comtian theory has shown itself peculiarly barren, and it is wonderful to look back and see how little has been done and how little influence upon human thought it has had.

There is this point, which the writer of the paper has left out, I think, viz., that it was an attempt to substitute something else for “a theological frame of mind,” to use Comte’s own expression. Taking “a theological frame of mind” in his very wide sense, it

is interesting to watch the absolute failure of an attempt to substitute his positiveness of assertion for theology.

As the writer has said, his religion of nature has proved almost too absurd for discussion; but it is interesting to remember that it is almost, if not the only, attempt seriously to substitute anything for the theological instinct which is of such tremendous force in human nature. (Applause.)

Mr. J. KENNEDY, B.C.S., &c.—I think that the author of this valuable paper has performed a useful service in pointing out the unfruitfulness of Comte's scientific speculations. Comte classified the sciences according to their complexity and their method: he tried to establish an impassable barrier between each; and the only unity he admitted was formal rather than real—a uniform process of development according to the "law of the three stages" and the employment to a limited extent of methods appropriate to the simpler sciences in the study of the more complex. Both these grounds are untenable. The author has well shown that Comte's account of the development of the sciences is historically inaccurate: the isolation of the sciences can no longer be maintained; and Comte's forecast of their future has been signally falsified by the result. The sciences have a unity of their own in a much more real sense than Comte realised. I do not think, however, that the value of Comte's work consists in its science, although he sought a scientific basis for it. Comte belonged to the second generation of the French Revolution, and he devoted himself to reconcile the doctrines of the Revolution with what he thought most worthy of preservation in the Ancient Régime. His work was in reality an Eirenicon—a reconciliation of science with religion and with politics; and in order to do this he constructed the most thoroughgoing and systematic philosophy of agnosticism which the world has seen. I ought perhaps to except Buddhism, with which the Positive Philosophy has many points of contact. Both are agnostic—both lay the greatest stress on morals, (I speak of Buddhism in its purer forms,) and both are hierarchical—though not theocratic. But Buddhism is the wider since it embraces all the animate creation; and it has in its doctrine of *Karma* an explanation of the present and a hope for the future which is wanting to the Positive Philosophy. Comte's agnostic philosophy is based on the "law of the three stages." Mankind develops from the theological to the metaphysical, and lastly to the scientific

stage, which abandons the search for causes, and contents itself with the phenomenal. To each of these stages a certain social structure is appropriate. Now this theory contains two great truths—First, that all societies are based on religious belief, and, second, that certain forms of belief imply a certain social structure. Polytheist states are founded on the cult of the family and tribe—Christianity and Mahomedanism are founded on individual belief. The individual obviously has an importance under the universal religions which he cannot have under the tribal ones. Neither of these propositions, however, is peculiar to Comte. A third proposition more especially his own is the impossibility of isolating any single set of social phenomena and constructing a special science out of them in independence of the whole. The author has pointed this out with much force in his remarks on Comte's view of political economy—a view which I am glad to believe now finds a pretty general acceptance.

But these propositions are subordinated to Comte's famous "law of the three stages"—a law which has at first sight a certain air of plausibility and fascinating simplicity about it. It purports to show a systematic sequence in the intellectual and practical evolution of mankind. The theological and militant societies are the earliest: the scientific and industrial the latest stages. Science aids invention and industry—while the wars of antiquity are all classified as religious wars. But science aids war as much as industry: commercial wars are common; and although every act of a Polytheist state was in a certain sense religious, and so were its wars of conquest—yet they were not undertaken from a religious motive, and the conquerors often adopted the gods of the vanquished. The great mass of mankind from the beginning of the world has been engaged in industrial pursuits; and if industry was chiefly the work at one time of the lower classes and of slaves, the elevation of the masses can nowhere be deduced from Comte's laws, although he assumes it. It is very largely due to the influence of Christianity. His account of the intellectual development of humanity is equally untenable. According to Comte the savage imagines everything to be animated; learning better by experience he explains everything by hidden essences and abstract qualities; at length he abandons the search for causes and confines himself to the observation of phenomena. In proof of this Comte appeals partly to history,

partly to the development of the child, and by analogy (a doubtful analogy) to that of the human race. The appeal to history is untenable; it is indeed in direct contradiction to the facts. Any one who has had any experience of savages knows that they no more confound things animate and inanimate than does the modern Englishman. The lower savages pay no attention to the ordinary processes of nature: they are too common to require explanation. The savage indeed explains any *peculiar* phenomenon or freak of nature as the work of a local spirit, for he conceives the race of spirits to be as the race of men; but he never confounds the phenomenon with the spirit which wrought it, or its habitation with itself. As a matter of fact, the higher savages employ a much larger spiritual agency than the lower ones do; and it is only in highly organised Polytheist states that we find a prevalent Pantheism—itself a generalisation from the universal agency of the spirit world. Comte himself admits that Mathematics never passed through the theological stage; and that no god was ever found for number or weight. The author has pointed out that this is true of all the other sciences: the science of the savage is as real in kind as the science of the savant. The appeal to history, then, is untenable. But Positivists rest the main stress of their argument not on history, but on the analogy of child life. I deny, however (and I speak with some experience), first, that any analogy exists between the thoughts of the child and the reasoning of the full-grown savage, or, second, that the infant does begin life with the presumption that all things are animated. What is animate, what inanimate, is a question of experience: the child may make a mistake as the grown man does, but he never fails to distinguish two classes of objects.

The metaphysical and scientific stages may be summarily dismissed. Comte knew nothing of metaphysics: his metaphysics are merely bad physics. Science has existed from the beginning: it has developed in extent, but not in kind: it occupies itself with phenomena, and gives no answer to the questions of theology and metaphysics. It cannot, therefore, take their place. I need not pursue Comte's system into further detail, but I should like to show briefly how Comte's view of religion is the reverse of what we hold to be the truth. The place of religion in the Positive Philosophy is merely that of an intellectual and antiquated mode of thought. This view of religion is of course obviously

insufficient. But even taking it thus, we might argue with truth that religion has immensely grown as an intellectual factor with the growth of mankind. The savage explains peculiar phenomena as the work of an unseen spirit; he bows his head when he passes the spirit's haunt; his religion at the best is occasional and intermittent. Christians and Mahomedans alike believe in God's perpetual conservation of the world's energy and existence as no less wonderful than its original creation. We admit that all our acts and feelings should be determined by His presence, for "in Him we live and move and have our being." Religion in this case is a constant force.

If Comte ignored the spiritual power of religion, he laid all the greater stress on morals. And yet his treatment of the development of morality is perhaps the greatest blot on his work. That development appears to me the most marvellous fact in the world's history. Yet Comte denied that any development had taken place! It is curious, as Mr. Slater says, that Comte should have refused to admit Lamarck's theories of evolution, although they would have helped him to establish his ideal unity of the sciences. It is equally curious that he should have denied the spiritual power of religion and the moral growth of the world, although his goal was the supremacy of altruism and the cult of "Humanity." In truth these exceptions were entirely antagonistic to the rest of his philosophy.

Comte's law of the three stages is from every point of view untenable; but he had a firm grasp of certain great social truths which I have pointed out: his historical summaries are sometimes superficial but often masterly, stimulating, and suggestive. Above all he tried to unite the two opposing currents of the French Revolution: to reconcile De Maistre with Condorcet. And it is here that his influence has told. His reverence for the past, his insistence on the correspondence between rights and duties, his conception of an altruism independent of a divine religion have undoubtedly exercised a considerable influence over agnostics—the only class who can accept his philosophy. Curiously enough his political speculations appear to me to have had a wider influence. They reflected certain currents of political speculation: and they may have aided political philosophers to form a philosophic basis for the Paris Commune and the Home Rule Bill for Ireland. With the Paris Commune the Positivists had much sympathy: and Mr.

Morley perhaps derived his ideas of the treatment of oppressed nationalities from this source.

I am sorry that Mr. Slater should have thought it necessary to refer to Comte's private life. He was mad when he quarrelled with his wife, and his relations to Madame C. de Vaux were, I believe, irreproachable. Comte was austere and virtuous, troubled only by an inordinate self-esteem. With almost everything else in the author's clear and interesting paper I have only to express my entire concurrence.

Professor H. LANGHORNE ORCHARD, M.A., B.Sc.—I think it is rather unfortunate that Comte's three stages of intellectual evolution are not allied to each other. They are not helpful to one another, but opposed to one another. The author has, I think, helped us to judge of Comte's true place and position as a philosopher, and has shown the very unscientific character of his mind. Comte attempted to classify the sciences and made mistakes which betrayed ignorance. He attempted to classify the different branches of science and physics and bungled. He made the prophecy that there was no connection between Astronomy and Chemistry—a prophecy which the subsequent discoveries of the spectroscope blew to the winds. Comte cannot, then, be regarded as having a scientific mind, neither do I think he had a philosophical mind. His second fundamental conception was that "There are but three phases of intellectual evolution for the individual as well as for the mass—the theological (supernatural, or, it might be said, the personifying), the metaphysical, and the positive"—that conception in that order appears to me to be utterly at variance with the true state of facts. It is supported neither by history nor experience. Comte's philosophy, in fact, has this great demerit: that it is not a philosophy at all. The great mission of philosophy—in fact, the very *raison d'être* of philosophy—is the investigation of causes; but it is just this investigation of causes that Comte taboos, and yet he supposes that his own system is, somehow or other, to effect an improvement in human conduct. He appears, after all, to entertain the notion of an end, but he does not see that the idea of an end and the means to an end involve the idea of cause. Means are really the connection between cause and effect. Comte, in tabooing *cause*, really tabooed *philosophy*. In any complete process of knowledge we commonly have these three stages connected one with another. This is seen in the case of the un-

taught savage, who notices that there is wind and that there is rain, which makes a suggestion to his mind of a certain sequence between wind in a particular direction and rain, and then the savage proceeds to connect those two events together and the thing becomes metaphysical. Despite Comte, the savage does go, to a certain extent, into this metaphysical stage. Comte does not believe that there is such a thing as force in nature. The poor savage believes there is, and goes further and believes in the Spirit, behind the cause. So all nature has a cause, and that cause originates from the great Spirit to whom the poor Indian can pray. The untaught savage as truly goes through these three stages as does the philosopher of the present day. To attempt to dissociate them, when they are intimately connected with each other and allied to each other in any complete process of knowledge, is manifestly unphilosophical. On what does Comte rely for the improvement of human society? Human improvement is held by him to depend on impulses from our propensities and defective faculties, all notions of public good being based on those of private or selfish advantage. He would seek, then, the improvement of Society in human nature—he would seek the Saviour of the lost among the lost themselves. But what does he say of human character? He speaks of “the radical imperfections of the human character,” and says, “we must regret that even in the best natures the social affections are so overborne by the personal as rarely to command conduct in a direct way.” He appears to prophesy the failure and impotence of his own system.

I desire to express my thanks to Mr. Slater for an exceedingly instructive and lucid account of Comte and his philosophy.

The CHAIRMAN.—I do not know whether Comte made reference to the very old idea of all knowledge branching from one stem, which is to be found in one of Lord Bacon's works, but one must see that a good many of Comte's best ideas are on those lines—whether they are borrowed from Lord Bacon or not I do not know. As a rule, people abstain from reading Bacon, and regard him as an effete writer; but the idea is well worthy of modern thought and admiration.

Rev. H. ELCUM.—I notice the author speaks of different stages in which Comte refers to the different sciences. Do I understand that he regards Comte as so speaking of those three stages that they could be worked out in each individual science?

The AUTHOR.—Yes.

Rev. H. ELCUM.—Or is he speaking of the mere general working out of the human mind?

The AUTHOR.—In reply to the last speaker, I should say that Comte endeavours to work out the three successive stages in every science—not in very full detail, but still in a general manner. For instance, he thinks that chemistry began with alchemy, in which every object and every process was personified or supposed to be acted on by an indwelling spirit. Then it went on to the metaphysical and supposed certain abstract entities, and finally, to its positive stage as it is in the present day when we confine ourselves to phenomena. That is not quite correct, however. We do not confine ourselves to phenomena, for we endeavour to find out cause, and the more progress we make in that direction the greater the discoveries that crown our efforts. If I had had more time at my disposal, or if I could have ventured to take up the time of the Society to any greater extent, I might have shown how Comte sub-divides his stages; for in personifying the epoch, he supposes man to be in a state of fetichism, considering that stocks and stones were really powers to be called upon to assist us in our undertakings or to be entreated not to interfere with us.

Then comes the second stage—the polytheistic—where a number of false gods were assumed by different nations; and then comes monotheism, under which, if we may judge from Comte's language, he regrets we are still labouring.

It has been remarked that I did not do well, perhaps, to refer to Comte's private life. Had he been a man of science "pure and simple," to borrow a French expression, I should have made no reference to his private life whatever; but as he posed as a reformer of the whole spiritual life of man, or took upon himself that rôle, I thought myself perfectly justified in showing that in his own person his ideas did not work in a very brilliant manner.

The meeting was then adjourned.