

"Must I lament o'er others' fame?

Must I but crawl while others race?

Luck! render me, thou cruel dame,

A junior in a Tichborne case,—

Of rich estates grant but the prize

To make a new Sir Roger rise.

"Place me on Hatherley's woollen sack,

Where none but justices and I

Shall e'er unwind Law's tortuous track,—

There let me live, and let me die.

Ah! me, such bliss may never bless,—

Dash down the cup of happiness."

W. E. H. F.

## BOOKS.

### CHRISTIANITY AND POSITIVISM.\*

THIS is a series of discourses belonging to the same family as the Bampton and Hulsean lectures. Mr. Zebulon Ely, of New York, founded in 1865 a lectureship on the Evidences of Christianity, and last spring the chair was filled by Dr. McCosh, a Scotchman, but now president of an American college, who has written various works on mental science and theology, one of which was ennobled by the praise of Sir W. Hamilton. His book is written with a great deal of good feeling; there is not a bitter word from beginning to end, there is evidence of some attempt to understand the thinkers who are to be confuted and of a rather wide range of interest on the subjects they have treated. It is a fairly good compendium of the matter-of-course answers to objections against Christianity, and being adorned with a liberal allowance of rhetoric, is, we imagine, likely to be popular. We are sorry that this is all the good we can say of the volume. A careful perusal of it has strengthened the prejudice with which we began against the kind of literature of which it is a specimen. We cannot but wish that our children in the New World would regard the measures by which we have loaded so many shelves with volumes that are no more satisfying to the doubter than brine to a thirsty man as a warning rather than an example. The pleading of an advocate may be a statement of the truth more adapted to some minds than the summing-up of a judge, and the Christian orator need not be debarred more than any other from the use of rhetoric, but we would not have him give us his rhetoric as logic, and as long as chairs are founded to establish the evidences of Christianity and none are founded to dispute them, this is what he is almost certain to do. For while rhetoric is the most popular kind of reading, and not probably the most difficult of writing, the chain of logical sequence is an arduous study to set up and to follow. It has become a fashion in our day to depreciate logic, we believe to our grievous loss. The part that it has to do in the establishment of truth—a small, but an indispensable part—would be more often recognized if the hired advocate in religion, like the hired advocate in law, were addressing an impartial court. But because he addresses those who are anxious to be convinced that somebody else's opinions are wrong, and not to have questions set to rest in their own minds, the quality which tells on his audience is not relevance, but eloquence. We regret the increase of this school of Apologetics, believing no attacks to be so dangerous as they to the cause they uphold.

That cause, so far as it is the vindication of a spiritual universe as an object of study no less fruitful of certainty than the visible universe, we hold, however, to be the hope of humanity, and in this belief we shall attempt, so far as is possible in the small space here open to us, to indicate the source and direction taken by two currents of thought which in our day lead men's minds away from theological investigation. And so little do these tendencies seem to us inherently evil, that we believe all that is vital in them to be owing, on the one hand, to the yearning after truth,—on the other, to the appreciation of love.

No influence has more deeply penetrated the mind of our day than that of physical science. We are not secured from it by never opening a book on the subject; it may be recognized in the tropes and figures of the newspaper-writer, it colours the speculations of thinkers who regard it with distaste, and prescribes a dialect to writers who are ignorant of every one of its laws. We see what it has done for us most clearly when we open a classical work. How strangely alike is the world of Horace to our own! How strangely unlike! What is the

subtle difference which separates us from one so vividly recalling at every word the tastes and opinions of to-day? A large part of the difference, we are convinced, is that the Roman regarded this as the mere theatre for the drama of human life; the interest in nature which makes its laws a part of the material of thought was as unknown to him as America. Now, this mighty, all-permeating influence of scientific thought is in our own day, it cannot be denied, hostile to Christianity. It has both a direct and an indirect influence in diverting men from that faith, it absorbs the attention which is demanded by theology, and it unfolds a series of conceptions not easily combined with those presented to us by theology. Science shows us an unbroken chain of cause and effect, binding past and future in a sequence which admits the invasion of no external force; theology speaks of sin and redemption, of an agency at work which ought not to have originated, and must be not modified or transformed, but destroyed. Science knows nothing of origin or of destruction, under its eye nothing ever begins or ends, it is only transformed. Theology not only starts from the belief in a creation, but demands space for an infinite exercise of the force that works in creation. Every prayer presupposes miracle,—not miracle in the vulgar sense of startling interference with ordinary sequence of cause and effect, but miracle in what we conceive its true sense, of result produced by spiritual agency alone, which is all that we can conceive of creation. The Christian theology demands this change in every life, declaring a new birth necessary to entrance into its kingdom, and pointing to what it asserts to be the greatest event in history as the type and consummation of the change needed by every soul. Science looks at every act as an effect of what has happened before, and asserts that character is only another name for the result of circumstance. Theology says, all preceding events being the same, this act ought to have been different,—all surrounding circumstances being unchanged, this man ought to be other than what he is. It is not that science and theology deal with different subject-matter; in the broad sense in which we are now using both those words a large part of their field of view is common. But by no possibility can you combine the different pictures they present into any whole.

Such is the antagonism between Christianity and the scientific spirit, as they confront each other in our day,—the divergent impulses which lead asunder the men whose aspirations centre respectively in the words *believe* and *know*. And such, in its broad general issue, is the divergence of theology and positivism, for positivism, as we understand it, is no more than the scientific spirit, invigorated by its long career of conquest to achieve a crowning victory, and add to its wide domain the region peopled by the desires and fears of man. But the word "positivism" is generally reserved for another school. We have said that only one-half of the opponents of Christianity in our day find their animating impulse in the reverence for truth, we have yet to attempt some appreciation of those who turn from it to find a deeper satisfaction for the need they feel of some broad human basis for love. We speak of those who are attracted towards the teaching of Auguste Comte with a hope, more or less definite, of finding in it some dynamic force which shall set right the disordered machinery of the world. Here we come to a much more decided antagonism to Christianity, scientific men as such merely averting their attention from it, while Comtists repudiate and seek to supplant it. But we must understand what the two sets of men have in common, before we can appreciate their distinctive peculiarities. In both these endeavours it must be remembered that we speak rather of Comtists than of Comte,—rather of vague tendencies than coherent doctrines, of strong sympathies than distinct opinions. We endeavour to mark out not so much what Comte taught, as what is hailed in his teaching by those who would fain see some hope for the regeneration of the world, but we must make some attempt to grasp the general idea of Comte's teaching, the power of misunderstanding which, we must say in passing, is wonderfully illustrated by the volume which has occasioned this notice, and which contains the extraordinary assertion that "Comte takes little or no notice of our ideas of morality" (p. 168). There are few theologians concerning whom the assertion would have been more unfortunate.

While it is true that what Comte meant by positivism can be exclusively appropriated to his influence only by those who confuse the definition of a name with the existence of a thing, the word itself should never be dis severed from his celebrated law of the three stages through which, he asserts, all human conception must pass,—the theological, metaphysical, and the positive. The positive philosophy we, must remember, is that which succeeds the

\* *Christianity and Positivism*. Lectures by James McCosh, D.D. London: Macmillan.

theological and metaphysical. It is distinguished at the outset rather by what it renounces than by what it claims. Successively receding, as it quits the theological stage, from the conception of *Will*,—as it quits the metaphysical, from that of *Cause*, philosophy, as it enters on its positive maturity, and satisfies itself with the conception of *Law*, loses in expansion what it gains in distinctness, certainty, and system. For what is *Will*? A something beyond all that we can describe when we try to give account to ourselves of the origin of any action in which it has issued. What is *cause*? We can only repeat the first answer, changing action to event. But when we ask, what is *Law*? the answer, in Comte's language, is complete. It is "the invariable relation of succession and similitude." This is not, as in any conceivable definition of will and cause, a mere finger-post, pointing out something extending indefinitely beyond itself. It is all that we mean by the word.

Now, it is no peculiarity of the teaching of Comte that this conception of law must be extended over the region of human actions before science is supreme. This must be felt more or less distinctly by all scientific men in our day. The discussions of a great naturalist lead him now to trace the development of Conscience, and a systematic treatise on logic includes an investigation of the conditions and operation of Will. But it is the system of Comte which in our day affords most hope of satisfaction to the aspirations of minds trained rather in history than in science, and finding their natural field rather in politics than in physics, after some method which shall subject the world of man to that same logical study which in the world of nature has been so fruitful of result. They see that physical science has laid up a body of compact coherent doctrine, invulnerable against all assailants. In science proper there is no such thing as opinion. The word describes an immature stage of science, a process through which it must pass, a blossom which may or may not bring forth fruit. After a certain time a scientific opinion must cease to exist, or pass into a received truth. Turn to the world of man, and all is changed. What great moral question, started in the morning of thought, may we lay aside as settled? The question of free-will was started before that of the relative movement of the sun and the earth; may we say of the earlier question as of the later, that expression of doubt about it would betray an unsound mind? Is the existence of those who have left this world (a question which has exercised the thought of man since man existed) received with the same kind of certainty as the existence of some mineral which the spectroscopic reveals in the sun (a revelation of the last few years)? What, say those who are trying to interpret, is the inference from the fact that doubt in the one case is, and in the other is not, a measure of ignorance? Surely that we should extend the scope of those principles which have made the study of nature a source of knowledge, and finally discard those which have made the study of man a source of opinion. And this is the doctrine which emerges most distinctly on the first attempt to study the writings of Comte.

This would be much, if it offered no prospect beyond a science of man as complete and certain as the science of nature. But how much more does Comtism offer! It is essentially a polity, or rather its heart lies in the nexus between a polity and a philosophy. The true speciality of Comtism, that which marks its differentia from the scientific spirit, and that characteristic which we sought to bring out in describing its adherents as men who sought rather to love than to know, lies herein, that Comte recognized a hierarchy in the human spirit. The fundamental principle of his teaching is that one part of our nature is rightful lord over the rest. No theologian has been severer than he on "the proud illusions of the supremacy of reason." Indeed he accords a warm sympathy to Theology on the ground that it recognizes the subordination of the reason to the moral instincts, a recognition which even in the erroneous form of this early belief, in which service meant slavery, he thinks worth any price. It is metaphysic which is his real foe, not theology. The search for Causes is to him the most futile of all pursuits, the search for Wills was not nearly so unlike the true philosophic spirit.

Now a study of the laws which bind society together with the object of binding society more firmly together, presents exactly those inducements which stir most deeply the best minds of our day. The most obvious characteristic of the times in which we live is the tendency to destroy all barriers which separate the different sections of society, but at the same time produce a firm cohesion within those different sections. That a separation as such should be regarded as evil is a new thing in the world. The ancient world was almost founded on the subordination of one set of human beings to another which we call slavery. The mediæval

system presents us with little more than this same subordination modified by Christianity. Probably the subject members of each system were as far from any aspirations after common rights as the superior ones were from any readiness to grant them: they might wish the relation inverted, they could hardly conceive it abolished. But we live in the triumph of democracy. Inequality has in our day, *per se*, become a grievance. I may complain not only of the evils which I suffer, but of the advantages which, with no superior merit on your part, you exclusively enjoy. This tendency is potent for good and for evil; it has, we suspect, weakened patriotism, but it has evoked a sense of human claim never before fully realized. When Mr. Mill was asked—what we still think the unanswerable question—how he could find anything but morality, as something ultimate, to act as sanction to a code which calls upon one man to sacrifice himself for the good of many? he answered (in the later editions of his *Utilitarianism*), "The unity of the human race." It is quite true that these words have a meaning in our time which they never had before. The sense of the tribe has widened gradually till it has spread over all the human world. That which is first discerned to be exceptional privilege is now accepted as common right. A great historian hails as individual virtue the refusal of a Greek general to enslave Greeks:—the obligation of conferring freedom on alien races, at the price of large sacrifice, is now recognized by nations. The idea which supports this claim is a new thing in the world, and lays hold on us with the force of youth.

But there must be many, even among those who welcome it most ardently, who ask themselves,—Has this idea of humanity any permanently binding power? Will it help me to endure the presence of this man who offends my taste? the claims of that other who opposes my interest? The question will be answered differently by different natures, but we fear all whose intellectual path we are trying to trace would agree in saying, "Attention is less wasted on any rival scheme than on Christianity; that, at all events, has been tried and proved wanting. If the name of Christ was ever a pledge of union, it is now only a badge of party. The crumbling partitions which severed tribe from tribe and nation from nation are now a mere relic of the past; but Christians have replaced them with enclosures far higher and far more contracted. One advantage there was in the old distinctions,—they at least were definite. The tribe was a distinct, unquestionable reality; whether a particular man did or did not belong to it was no matter of opinion. But the distinction of 'believer' and 'the world' has no such advantage. There is an unquestionably large party of adversaries to hate, no doubt, but there is only a very small and doubtful body of adherents to love. We must look for a bond on ground broader as well as more stable than theirs."

When minds, naturally religious, waken up to the contrast presented on the one hand by a religion unable, after 1,800 years of unshaken dominion, to prevail over its own divisions, reposing on pretensions which will not bear any of the tests by which all unquestioned truth has been decided, and exercising influence on the average minds of to-day through motives largely mixed with worldliness, and on the other hand, a religion which has not yet had time to split up its followers into parties, which allies itself with science, which presents no attraction but the hope of truth, it is not wonderful that they should forsake the old for the new. It is easy to say they choose the play of *Hamlet* without the part of *Hamlet*. It does not seem so to them. "What constitutes Christianity?" they would ask, "but some belief or other about a particular man who lived 1,800 years ago, and called himself the Son of Man? We see our Son of Man in the future. We find in the ideal of a purified and united humanity all that you say you find in the history of an individual. Nay, far more, for our belief unites us, and yours only separates you."

We have exhausted our space in the endeavour to give some expression to views which exclude all that we believe most vital in truth. How are they to be met? To a considerable extent by doing that which all lectureships established to confute scepticism are an elaborate device to prevent,—by a sympathetic and reverent study of what we oppose. We have tried to show how two currents draw men from Christianity, moving those who find it unhelpful to a life-long study of truth, and those who find it hurtful to a yearning after universal love. If we believe that what Christ taught, promised, commanded can give the patience and self-suppression of the seeker after truth, and still more the patience and self-suppression of the only love worthy of the name, we must give no more fees to the counsel for the defence. We must seek rather that, however venerable and precious, the things which can be shaken may be shaken, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.