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OUTLINES
OF THE
HISTORY OF RELIGION

BY
JOHN K. INGRAM, LL.D.

"L'homme devient de plus en plus religieux"

—AUGUSTE COMTE

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TO
AUGUSTE COMTE,
FOUNDER OF THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY.

Vagliami il lungo studio e il grande amore,
Che m' han fatto cercar lo tuo volume.
Tu se' lo mio maestro, e il mio autore.

P R E F A C E.

THE present publication makes no claim to originality. The one object I have kept before me is to represent correctly, in an abbreviated and somewhat simplified form, the doctrine of Auguste Comte on the subject of the volume. I have followed his systematic divisions and classifications, and the order of his exposition;¹ and, when he appeared to express an idea with special aptness or force, I have often adopted his words. I have sought to include in the body of the text only what he has somewhere said in substance; when observations occurred to me, suggested by his language or seeming to illustrate his views, I have embodied them

¹ In vol. iii. of the *Politique Positive*.

in a footnote. The concluding remarks are my own, though these also are, of course, founded on his writings.

Those who are already acquainted with Comte's system may be disposed to ask why I have undertaken this task at all, since I have only reproduced in altered form what is to be found in his works. I answer, I have done it with the object of attracting to the study of those works such of my readers as have capacity and leisure for that study, and of furnishing intelligent persons who, in our busy modern life, cannot find time for personal investigation, or have not the necessary preparation for it, with such an outline of his historical doctrine as may place them at the right point of view in relation to the spiritual evolution of our race. Positivism is in the air, and is more and more attracting the attention of earnest minds. Groups of persons in different parts of the world have adopted it as their intellectual creed and their rule of life. I shall much regret if at such a time the present sketch should draw away a single student from direct inquiry into what the Master has himself said. I have

hoped that I might rather stimulate such inquiry, and, where circumstances make it difficult or impossible, might at least prevent misconception, and supply food for profitable reflection.

The work which is incumbent on us and on our immediate successors is that of bringing the modern Revolution to an end. In its historical course, it contained within it two distinct, though closely connected, movements—one, the dissolution of the old system of thought and life; the other, the social establishment of the new. The former of these operations has been, notwithstanding superficial appearances, sufficiently accomplished; the plan of the latter has been traced, but its practical realisation still lies before us. The elements of the new order had, during several centuries, been prepared by the development of scientific thought and the prevalence of industrial activity. What was then required was a general doctrine, founded on positive knowledge, capable of combining, co-ordinating, and directing the theoretical and practical sides of modern existence—of, in fact, in the largest

sense, regulating human life : in other words, a new Religion. And it is my conviction that the Religion of Humanity, founded by Auguste Comte, can alone meet this great demand, can alone acquire and maintain a universal ascendancy over public and private conduct, through a discipline of the feelings and a renovation of the intellect.

This practical mission of Positivism is often overlooked. Notwithstanding the name of the system, which places it in sharp contrast with Negativism, many people, reading what is said of it in the journals of the day, often by writers who really know very little of it, regard its doctrine as discarding Theologism and leaving a blank in its stead. That judgment properly characterises the incoherent schemes of the Revolutionary schools, but is inapplicable to Positivism, which establishes new convictions to take the place of the old. If any one supposes that its ascendancy will relax the stringency of duty or weaken moral discipline, he labours under a fundamental error. Resting on scientific truth, it will give a more solid foundation for the exercise of personal self-

control as well as for the spiritual government of society than can be derived from the now decadent forms of religious opinion. Our conduct, in the adult period of our race, must be guided by what we know, not by what we do not and cannot know. And the vague sentiments to which theologians now mainly appeal can never furnish the steady support and the effective stimulus to right action which are supplied by demonstrable beliefs.

The dissolving action of the modern Revolution, as traced in the following pages, went as far as to develop a twofold form of Deism, and this creed, in the one or the other shape, represented the condition of mind of most French, and many English, thinkers at the beginning of the nineteenth century, while some had proceeded as far as Atheism. As a permanent state of opinion, this last is more at variance with the spirit of Positivism than any theological faith, because it is purely destructive and leads only to cosmogonic and other irrational or idle speculation, carrying men away from the social and moral issues which are at once accessible and all-important. Few in our

time occupy this standpoint; the prevalent state of opinion of those Westerns who do not adhere to Christianity is that of a more or less general scepticism. Accredited writers have taken up the ground that perhaps, after all, nothing, even in the physical world, can be really known; and have presented this, according to an old and often-repeated tactic, as a reason, not for themselves accepting, but for inducing others to accept, the whole theological tradition. But in a scientific age this way of contemplating things is not likely to produce much effect, and the most notable effort towards it seems to be already discounted. The ordinary cultivated Englishman, who has parted with the 'orthodox' faith, commonly rests (if such a word may be used of a state liable to perpetual fluctuation) in the equivocal and self-contradictory form of opinion which is sometimes called Neo-, but ought rather to be named Pseudo-Christianity. This is an attempt to retain the Christian name and attitude while rejecting the Christian creed, thus depriving that religion of all that gives it any degree of logical coherence or practical efficacy, and sub-

stituting individual impressions for authoritative dogma.¹ This habit of mind, whilst it is an interesting symptom of the transition now in progress, has little claim to our indulgence, and less to our respect, for it is alike without rational and historical justification, and most commonly results from intellectual inertia or moral cowardice.

I have often thought that the atmosphere of controversy would be cleared, and mystification avoided, if those who write on these great subjects now, when not criticism but construction is the order of the day, would indicate distinctly to their readers the extent of their own beliefs. I fear a good many, by judicious reserves and adroit adjustments of phrase, pass themselves off upon us as 'orthodox' in religion who do not really accept the dogmas they seem to defend. All the circumstances of our time call for sincerity, and those who are not really in earnest had better be silent.

¹ This tone of mind has been encouraged by the temporary vogue of the writings of Renan, in which, along with much that is ingenious and even just, there is a general absence of rigorous logic, and a pervading flavour of sickly sentimentality, which, in the end, in spite of the charm of his style, become repellent to a strong intellect and a healthy taste.

Any one who understands his age must see that we have come to an *impasse*—that without a change at once in our point of view and our policy no really important, or even solid, results can be achieved in the social and moral sphere—that nothing can be realised beyond *motus in circulo*. And not only so, but doubt is sapping all foundations, and many of the most precious acquisitions of our race are imperilled by subversive utopias. They cannot be preserved without a rational system of belief; only a scientific doctrine of human nature and society, and, associated with this, a new affective culture and practical régime, can avert the deluge.

Some of those who, whilst unfriendly to Positivism, do not feel themselves able to confute its claims, are fond of representing it as premature, and proposing to postpone the consideration of it until Science and History have completed the investigations in which during our time they have been engaged. Our notions of the world, it is said, will be modified by further inquiry, and our views of the past will be altered by the discovery of documents of various kinds which have hitherto escaped

observation. The time for a new synthesis, it is inferred, has not yet arrived. This way of speaking may impose on some who do not understand the present situation of the human mind. But the premises thus suggested do not lead to the conclusion which it is sought to draw from them. The *one* necessary condition of the production of a definitive synthesis was the establishment of each of the seven fundamental sciences on a positive basis. Once placed on this basis, their development will proceed uninterruptedly in the future; but we can at once take our stand at the right general point of view at which it is the object of philosophy to place us, and can conform our habitual feelings and modes of action to the standard created by our new convictions. This was impossible so long as the three different attitudes of mind—the Theological, the Metaphysical, and the Positive—co-existed in different intellectual provinces. But the foundation of Sociology by Comte, with his consequent establishment of Morals on their true foundation, has cleared this impossibility out of the way, and has enabled us to form a

just and harmonious, though, of course, not an absolutely complete, conception of the natural order. Further theories of a less comprehensive kind will be added, as Humanity requires, to the primary doctrines of the scientific faith. Hitherto unknown memoirs, State papers and other sources of knowledge concerning individual transactions will supply corrections or enlargements of our historical ideas. But the basis, whether of method or of doctrine, will remain unaffected. In the cosmical and the human sciences alike, the broad and common phenomena are the most important, and the desideratum is not so much to ascertain facts as to understand their relations and discover their laws.

So far with respect to Positivism in general. I must now say a few words as to the view of history which is presented in the following pages.

There are estimable works, in which, under the name, *History of Religion*, are presented detailed descriptions of the several special forms which it has assumed in different human societies—Brahmanism, Buddhism, Zoroastrian-

ism, and the rest. But it is obvious that history implies progressive evolution, and that this can exist only within a definite continuous, and sufficiently homogeneous, social series. The definitive solution of the religious problem has been committed by all the forces which have acted on our race to the nations of the West. When it has been recognised and applied by those nations, will come the time for its extension to the Eastern monotheists and to the Theocratic and Fetishistic populations. Then all the sound knowledge of the existing religious systems of the world which the researches of scholars and the observation of practical men shall have gained will be of the greatest value for the purpose of effectively propagating the final synthesis. But the object now most important is to understand the modifications which have successively taken place in the opinions of the social group of which we ourselves form a part, and through which the true faith must be communicated to the rest of mankind.

There are some questions which have been much discussed by the so-called Anthropologists respecting the early phases of social

development, to which no reference is made in the present essay. Comte did not aim—and I, accordingly, have not done so—at describing all the institutions of primitive man. With respect to several problems, perhaps rather curious than important, which are still *sub judice*, nothing is here either affirmed or denied. What has been sought is to give such a general conception of the past, both remote and recent, as will convey its essential character, and will enable the intelligent reader, who is not a specialist, to understand the human movement as a whole, and appreciate the filiation which marks its successive stages. This large view of the subject ought to be universally apprehended, especially now when it is so important to develop or confirm the historic spirit and the sentiment of social continuity, as well as to prepare thoughtful minds for an inevitable future.

It will be seen that I do not adopt the non-natural theory which looks on Protestantism as representing the true type of historical Christianity. I regard, as did Comte, the Church of Gregory the Great, of Hildebrand and St Bernard, as its real representative, and Protes-

tantism as the first stage in its systematic demolition, following on its spontaneous disorganisation. Luther, Calvin, and Socinus mark the three most prominent steps in the evolution of its decadence—the discipline, the hierarchical constitution, and the doctrine being successively assailed. That the maintenance of the modified system or group of systems, which remained after they had severally exercised their dissolving influence, is becoming highly precarious, every one now sees. But the hopes which Catholics sometimes found on the growing weakness of the Protestant opposition are as fallacious as were the expectations of a universal triumph suggested to the Reformers by the partial successes of the sixteenth century. As the Roman world has long been divided between Christianity and Islam, so, since the Thirty Years' War, the Christian West has been divided between Catholicism and Protestantism. Each may occasionally gain a local or temporary superiority, but neither will absorb the other; both will disappear before the march of the Religion of Humanity.

A few words of personal explanation may

here be permitted me. Those who have lived in close relations with me are already aware of my adhesion to the Positive doctrine. Some, even of those who were acquainted with the fact, and amongst them persons who are entitled to my respect, will perhaps be offended by the public declaration of that adhesion. But I cannot apologise for maintaining what I believe to be true. I have not rashly propounded the opinions here put forward. During my whole adult life I have devoted earnest thought to the great religious and social questions, the supreme importance of which I early recognised. My attention having been called to Positivism, mainly through the notices of it in J. S. Mill's *Logic*, I gave it much serious study. When the philosophical doctrine rose into the Religion of Humanity, I became fully convinced that it was what mankind wanted in the spiritual sphere. Whilst I endeavoured to acquire and maintain the acquaintance with various forms of intellectual activity required for the proper discharge of my academic functions, as well as demanded by the culture of our epoch, I was content to renounce the work of production in

the several special departments which I might perhaps have cultivated with a certain degree of success, and to devote the greatest part of my time and mental energy to obtaining a thorough knowledge of what appeared to me more necessary for the world than any results I was likely to attain in the particular fields of contemporary research. Now approaching the close of my career, I do not regret this choice; and I am desirous of communicating to others the convictions which have been to myself a source of mental satisfaction and of moral guidance.

Intellectually constrained to accept the philosophic bases on which the Positive Religion rests, I have tried its efficacy on my own heart and life; and, whilst lamenting the insufficient degree in which I have followed its teachings, I have learned to appreciate its practical power. No creed seems to me so effectually to destroy the 'refuges of lies' by which our partiality for ourselves leads us to excuse our misdeeds and shortcomings. I have found it to pronounce the demands of duty in such a way that they cannot be mistaken or eluded. And it appears to me to be alone capable of real social efficacy;

in particular, no otherwise than through its extension can the moral unity of mankind be ultimately realised. Long a silent student and observer of the wants and tendencies of my time, and regarding myself as under an implied contract not to interfere with the religious ideas of the young persons whose literary instruction was intrusted to me, I do not, now that I am free from any such obligation, feel justified in continuing this reticence to the end. Holding the religion I profess to be the *unum necessarium* for society, I cannot be content to pass away, as I must soon do, without giving public expression to that conviction.

38 UPPER MOUNT STREET, DUBLIN.