

## A GENERAL VIEW OF POSITIVISM.

“We tire of thinking and even of acting; we never tire of loving.”

IN the following series of systematic essays upon Positivism, the essential principles of the doctrine are first considered; I then point out the agencies by which its propagation will be effected; and I conclude by describing certain additional features indispensable to its completeness. My treatment of these questions will of course be summary: yet it will suffice, I hope, to overcome several excusable but unfounded prejudices. It will enable any competent reader to assure himself that the new general doctrine aims at something more than satisfying the Intellect; that it is in reality quite as favourable to Feeling and even to Imagination.

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

POSITIVISM consists essentially of a Philosophy and a Polity. These can never be dissevered; the former being the basis, and the latter the end of one comprehensive system, in which our intellectual faculties and our social sympathies are brought into close correlation with each other. For, in the first place, the science of Society,

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besides being more important than any other, supplies the only logical and scientific link by which all our varied observations of phenomena can be brought into one consistent whole.\* Of this science it is even more true than of any of the preceding sciences, that its real character cannot be understood without explaining its exact relation in all general features with the art corresponding to it. Now here we find a coincidence which is assuredly not fortuitous. At the very time when the theory of society is being laid down, an immense sphere is opened for the application of that theory; the direction, namely, of the social regeneration of Western Europe. For, if we take another point of view, and look at the great crisis of modern history, as its character is displayed in the natural course of events, it becomes every day more evident how hopeless is the task of reconstructing political institutions without the previous remodelling of opinion and of life. To form then a satisfactory synthesis of all human conceptions is the most urgent of our social wants: and it is needed equally for the sake of Order and of Progress. During the gradual accomplishment of this great philosophical work, a new moral power will arise spontaneously throughout the West, which, as its influence increases, will lay down a definite basis for the reorganization of society. It will offer a general system of education for the adoption of all civilized nations, and by this means will supply in every department of public and private life fixed principles of judgment and of conduct. Thus the intellectual movement and the social crisis will be brought

\* The establishment of this great principle is the most important result of my "System of Positive Philosophy." This work was published 1830-1842, with the title of "Course of Positive Philosophy," because it was based upon a course of lectures delivered 1826-1829. But since that time I have always given it the more appropriate name of System. Should the work reach a second edition, the correction will be made formally: meanwhile, this will, I hope, remove all misconception on the subject.

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continually into close connection with each other. Both will combine to prepare the advanced portion of humanity for the acceptance of a true spiritual power, a power more coherent, as well as more progressive, than the noble but premature attempt of mediæval Catholicism.

The primary object, then, of Positivism is twofold: to generalize our scientific conceptions, and to systematize the art of social life. These are but two aspects of one and the same problem. They will form the subjects of the two first chapters of this work. I shall first explain the general spirit of the new philosophy. I shall then show its necessary connection with the whole course of that vast revolution which is now about to terminate under its guidance in social reconstruction.

This will lead us naturally to another question. The regenerating doctrine cannot do its work without adherents: in what quarter should we hope to find them? Now, with individual exceptions of great value, we cannot expect the adhesion of any of the upper classes in society. They are all more or less under the influence of baseless metaphysical theories, and of aristocratic self-seeking. They are absorbed in blind political agitation, and in disputes for the possession of the useless remnants of the old theological and military system. Their action only tends to prolong the revolutionary state indefinitely, and can never result in true social renovation.

Whether we regard its intellectual character or its social objects, it is certain that Positivism must look elsewhere for support. It will find a welcome in those classes only whose good sense has been left unimpaired by our vicious system of education, and whose generous sympathies are allowed to develop themselves freely. It is among Women, therefore, and among the Working classes that the heartiest supporters of the new doctrine will be

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found. It is intended, indeed, ultimately for all classes of society. But it will never gain much real influence over the higher ranks till it is forced upon their notice by these powerful patrons. When the work of spiritual reorganization is completed, it is on them that its maintenance will principally depend; and so too, their combined aid is necessary for its commencement. Having but little influence in political government, they are the more likely to appreciate the need of a moral government, the special object of which it will be to protect them against the oppressive action of the temporal power.

In the third chapter, therefore, I shall explain the mode in which philosophers and working men will co-operate. Both have been prepared for this coalition by the general course which modern history has taken, and it offers now the only hope we have of really decisive action. We shall find that the efforts of Positivism to regulate and develop the natural tendencies of the people, make it, even from the intellectual point of view, more coherent and complete.

But there is another and a more unexpected source from which Positivism will obtain support; and not till then will its true character and the full extent of its constructive power be appreciated. I shall show in the fourth chapter how eminently calculated is the Positive doctrine to raise and regulate the social condition of Women. It is from the feminine aspect only that human life, whether individually or collectively considered, can really be comprehended as a whole. For the only basis on which a system really embracing all the requirements of life can be formed, is the subordination of intellect to social feeling: a subordination which we find directly represented in the womanly type of character, whether regarded in its personal or social relations.

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Although these questions cannot be treated fully in the present work, I hope to convince my readers that Positivism is more in accordance with the spontaneous tendencies of the people and of women than Catholicism, and is therefore better qualified to institute a spiritual power. It should be observed that the ground on which the support of both these classes is obtained is, that Positivism is the only system which can supersede the various subversive schemes that are growing every day more dangerous to all the relations of domestic and social life. Yet the tendency of the doctrine is to elevate the character of both of these classes; and it gives a most energetic sanction to all their legitimate aspirations.

Thus it is that a philosophy originating in speculations of the most abstract character, is found applicable not merely to every department of practical life, but also to the sphere of our moral nature. But to complete the proof of its universality I have still to speak of another very essential feature. I shall show, in spite of prejudices which exist very naturally on this point, that Positivism is eminently calculated to call the Imaginative faculties into exercise. It is by these faculties that the unity of human nature is most distinctly represented: they are themselves intellectual, but their field lies principally in our moral nature, and the result of their operation is to influence the active powers. The subject of women treated in the fourth chapter, will lead me by a natural transition to speak in the fifth of the Esthetic aspects of Positivism. I shall attempt to show that the new doctrine by the very fact of embracing the whole range of human relations in the spirit of reality, discloses the true theory of Art, which has hitherto been so great a deficiency in our speculative conceptions. The principle of the theory is that, in co-ordinating the primary

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functions of Humanity, Positivism places the Idealities of the poet midway between the Ideas of the philosopher and the Realities of the statesman. We see from this theory how it is that the poetical power of Positivism cannot be manifested at present. We must wait until moral and mental regeneration has advanced far enough to awaken the sympathies which naturally belong to it, and on which Art in its renewed state must depend for the future. The first mental and social shock once passed, Poetry will at last take her proper rank. She will lead Humanity onward towards a future which is now no longer vague and visionary, while at the same time she enables us to pay due honour to all phases of the past. The great object which Positivism sets before us individually and socially, is the endeavour to become more perfect. The highest importance is attached therefore to the imaginative faculties, because in every sphere with which they deal they stimulate the sense of perfection. Limited as my explanations in this work must be, I shall be able to show that Positivism, while opening out a new and wide field for art, supplies in the same spontaneous way new means of expression.

I shall thus have sketched with some detail the true character of the regenerating doctrine. All its principal aspects will have been considered. Beginning with its philosophical basis, I pass by natural transitions to its political purpose; thence to its action upon the people, its influence with women, and lastly, to its esthetic power. In concluding this work, which is but the introduction to a larger treatise, I have only to speak of the conception which unites all these various aspects. As summed up in the positivist motto, *Love, Order, Progress*, they lead us to the conception of Humanity, which implicitly involves and gives new force to each of them. Rightly inter-

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preting this conception, we view Positivism at last as a complete and consistent whole. The subject will naturally lead us to speak in general terms of the future progress of social regeneration, as far as the history of the past enables us to foresee it. The movement originates in France, and is limited at first to the great family of Western nations. I shall show that it will afterwards extend, in accordance with definite laws, to the rest of the white race, and finally to the other two great races of man.

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## CHAPTER I.

## THE INTELLECTUAL CHARACTER OF POSITIVISM.

The object of Philosophy is to present a systematic view of human life, as a basis for modifying its imperfections.

THE object of all true Philosophy is to frame a system which shall comprehend human life under every aspect, social as well as individual. It embraces, therefore, the three kinds of phenomena of which our life consists, Thoughts, Feelings, and Actions. Under all these aspects, the growth of Humanity is primarily spontaneous; and the basis upon which all wise attempts to modify it should proceed, can only be furnished by an exact acquaintance with the natural process. We are, however, able to modify this process systematically; and the importance of this is extreme, since we can thereby greatly diminish the partial deviations, the disastrous delays, and the grave inconsistencies to which so complex a growth would be liable were it left entirely to itself. To effect this necessary intervention is the proper sphere of politics. But a right conception cannot be formed of it without the aid of the philosopher, whose business it is to define and amend the principles on which it is conducted. With this object in view the philosopher endeavours to co-ordinate the various elements of man's existence, so that it may be conceived of theoretically as an integral whole. His synthesis can only be valid in so far as it is an exact and complete representation of the relations naturally existing. The first condition is therefore that these relations



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be carefully studied. When the philosopher, instead of forming such a synthesis, attempts to interfere more directly with the course of practical life, he commits the error of usurping the province of the statesman, to whom all practical measures exclusively belong. Philosophy and Politics are the two principal functions of the great social organism. Morality, systematically considered, forms the connecting link and at the same time the line of demarcation between them. It is the most important application of philosophy, and it gives a general direction to polity. Natural morality, that is to say the various emotions of our moral nature, will, as I have shown in my previous work, always govern the speculations of the one and the operations of the other. This I shall explain more fully.

But the synthesis, which it is the social function of Philosophy to construct, will neither be real nor permanent, unless it embraces every department of human nature, whether speculative, affective, or practical. These three orders of phenomena react upon each other so intimately, that any system which does not include all of them must inevitably be unreal and inadequate. Yet it is only in the present day, when Philosophy is reaching the positive stage, that this which is her highest and most essential mission can be fully apprehended.

The theological synthesis depended exclusively upon our affective nature; and to this is owing its original supremacy and its ultimate decline. For a long time its influence over all our highest speculations was paramount. This was especially the case during the Polytheistic period, when Imagination and Feeling still retained their sway under very slight restraint from the reasoning faculties. Yet even during the time of its highest development,

The Theological synthesis failed to include the practical side of human nature.

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intellectually and socially, theology exercised no real control over practical life. It reacted, of course, upon it to some extent, but the effects of this were in most cases far more apparent than real. There was a natural antagonism between them, which though at first hardly perceived, went on increasing till at last it brought about the entire destruction of the theological fabric. A system so purely subjective could not harmonize with the necessarily objective tendencies and stubborn realities of practical life. Theology asserted all phenomena to be under the dominion of Wills more or less arbitrary : whereas in practical life men were led more and more clearly to the conception of invariable Laws. For without laws human action would have admitted of no rule or plan. In consequence of this utter inability of theology to deal with practical life, its treatment of speculative and even of moral problems was exceedingly imperfect, such problems being all more or less dependent on the practical necessities of life. To present a perfectly synthetic view of human nature was, then, impossible as long as the influence of theology lasted ; because the Intellect was impelled by Feeling and by the Active powers in two totally different directions. The failure of all metaphysical attempts to form a synthesis need not be dwelt upon here. Metaphysicians, in spite of their claims to absolute truth, have never been able to supersede theology in questions of feeling, and have proved still more inadequate in practical questions. Ontology, even when it was most triumphant in the schools, was always limited to subjects of a purely intellectual nature ; and even here its abstractions, useless in themselves, dealt only with the case of individual development, the metaphysical spirit being thoroughly incompatible with the social point of view. In my work on Positive Philosophy I have clearly proved that it