

THE SOUTHERN PRESBYTERIAN REVIEW,

VOL. XXXII.—NO. 3.

JULY, MDCCCLXXXI.

ARTICLE I.

AGNOSTICISM.¹

When Auguste Comte propounded his philosophical system to the world, he gave that system the name of Positivism. The scientific method which he in common with the body of physical inquirers pursued, and which he commended as the only method that is fruitful of valuable or satisfactory results, he styled the Positive, and the thinkers who, under his guidance, adopted and advocated that method to the exclusion of every other, he denominated Positivists. These descriptive terms were willingly accepted by the bulk of his followers; even by such of them as John Stuart Mill, and perhaps *M. Littré*, distinguished pupils who considerably modified and extended the views of the acknowledged master of the school. From this it was a very natural step to apply the convenient term "Positivists" to *all* who, in addition to the familiarity they betray with Comte's nomenclature, agree with Comte in his essential principles; nor has the fashion of doing so wholly gone out even now that so

¹This paper takes its starting-point from the article on Positivism in the work entitled "Modern Philosophy, from Descartes to Schopenhauer and Hartmann. By Francis Bowen, A. M., Alford Professor of Natural Religion and Moral Philosophy in Harvard College. Second Edition. New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Company, 1878."

many (in England particularly) of this class of sceptical materialists have protested vehemently against any classification that would put them in the same category with the author of *La Philosophie Positive*. Amongst the prominent men who have uttered such a caveat, we need only mention Mr. Huxley, Mr. John Tyndall, and Mr. Herbert Spencer. These leading writers prefer, it seems, to cut loose from Auguste Comte, and strengthen their connexions with David Hume. Mr. Huxley, in one of his Lay-Sermons, ridicules the notion that he or any who think with him are disciples of the crazy mathematician of France, and is at some pains to evince that Comte's pretentious fabric has crumbled little by little under the pressure that has been brought to bear upon it by a host of later scientific specialists. It is a little curious, and not a little diverting, to see the sharp-witted savans of the present day flying from the lordly scientific structure erected by the man who but a short time ago was cried up as "a Daniel come to judgment," or as the Bacon of the nineteenth century—as rats are said to desert a falling house. What makes this all the more noticeable, and what is not especially creditable to the fastidious champions of Hume as against Comte, is that some of them probably never saw any good in Hume until Comte showed it to them, and that they continue to use those words which may justly be regarded as Comte's *shibboleths*—such as "environment," "sociology," and the like; but above all, that they retain, and without due acknowledgment, the foundation stones on which Comte builded. It is true that Comte himself builded on the foundation-stones laid by Hume, and afterwards strengthened by Brown and James Mill. It is true also that Condillac and others on the Continent of Europe had pushed the reasoning from Locke's premises, as they understood them, to the extremest materialism. But Auguste Comte was the first to connect the experience doctrine of Hume, and his theory as to causation, with an elaborate scheme of physical science on the one hand, and of philosophical nescience on the other; and this is the very thing that is regarded as the peculiar glory of the most advanced school of English agnostics. It is hardly enough to say in reply, that Comte abhorred metaphysics and rejected

psychology entirely from his pyramid of ascending sciences. This is a fact; and it is a fact too that Mr. Herbert Spencer, and others who agree in a general way with Mr. Herbert Spencer, have in *their* scheme left "ample room and verge enough" for psychology and metaphysics; but it is equally a fact that some of Comte's most distinguished pupils have done the same, and have expressed regret that their master should have been color-blind in relation to the whole domain of supra-physical and supra-social phenomena. This is conspicuously the attitude of the late Mr. Lewes and of John Stuart Mill.¹ Besides, let them say what they please, the grand realm of agnosticism is after all the realm of the strictly mathematical, physical, and economic sciences; and, as considered by *some* agnostics, psychology itself is treated of from a *stand-point* which requires the student to regard it as little more, or nothing more, than a department of animal physiology.

Notwithstanding all the disclaimers of their opponents, however, certain eminent apologists for Theism have persisted in using the terms "positive" and "positivist" in application not only to Comte and the Comtists proper, but to many who are unwilling to be so designated and yet answer readily to the name *agnostics*. A year or two ago the writer of this critique was gently chided at a dinner-table by a very gifted and accomplished man, who has become justly famous for both mathematical and classical researches, because the writer had ventured to take the term "positivist" in its broad and popular acceptance. Already the high authority of President McCosh, and others in England and America, could be pleaded, and was pleaded, in partial justification of this usage. Thus, under the head of "Positivism," Dr. McCosh says: "I take as representatives of it. M. Comte, Mr. Mill, and Mr. Herbert Spencer. They have auxiliaries in Mr. Grote, Mr. Lewes, Mr. Buckle, Professor Bain, Professor Huxley, and others, powerful in particular departments; but these three may be held as the ablest defenders of their peculiar principles. All agree in this, that man can know nothing of the

¹See Mill's Preface (or introduction) to his "Positivism," and Lewes's History of Philosophy.

nature of things; that he can know merely phenomena, or relation of things unknown; and that all he can do with these is to generalise them into laws. All agree further, that it is impossible to rise to the knowledge of first or final causes, and they exert their whole energy in denouncing the attempt to find what they call occult causes. So far they agree. On other and not-unimportant points they differ.¹ . . ." Since the conversation took place that was just now referred to, the testimonies of Professor Francis Bowen and of Mr. Mallock have been given in, and will be found to sustain at once the definition and the nomenclature of Dr. McCosh. Says Professor Bowen :

"Notorious as it has become, Positivism pure and simple is not in good repute nowadays, and finds very few, perhaps not more than half a dozen, thorough-going adherents. In fact since the death of its French founder, I hardly know any writers or thinkers of some note and importance, except Mr. Congreve, Mr. Harrison, and Dr. Bridges in England, and perhaps M. Littré and one or two others in France, who are now willing to be called Positivists, and as such, are still zealous and thorough-going advocates of the whole body of doctrine which was first promulgated, as he says, by Auguste Comte, though the real merit or demerit of the largest portion of it is due to David Hume. Even Mr. G. H. Lewes, author of two ponderous but well written volumes on the 'History of Philosophy,' though an earnest proselyte, as it seems to me, of Hume and Comte on all important points, or for general substance of doctrine, still does not accept the name of *Positivist*, perhaps because he prefers to be considered an independent thinker. And Mr. Huxley, after giving an amusing account of the attempts made by two eminent speculatists to shake off the odious appellation, takes an opportunity of repudiating Comtism in his own behalf, and he might have added, of taking leave of it in a very characteristic manner, by affixing to it a stinging epigram. He designates it, with no less truth than point, as 'Catholicism *minus* Christianity.'²

Truly this is a reversal of the ancient fable of Saturn eating his own children! Professor Huxley's jibe is, of course, directed against the Atheistic *religious* [!] system of Comte's old age, and which had for its object the "worship of humanity." Professor Bowen then goes on to inquire how it comes to pass that a

¹See "Christianity and Positivism," p. 107.

²Bowen's "Modern Philosophy," pp. 262, 263.

system of philosophic thought propounded about a half a century ago by "a partially insane French teacher of mathematics," and that now has no more than a corporal's guard of ardent defenders who adopt the entire system, should be popularly regarded as so widespread and so formidable. Here is his answer. . . . "Positivism has two perfectly distinct meanings:— the first, a broad and comprehensive one, including the whole body of doctrine taught by Auguste Comte in the six ponderous octavo volumes, averaging about eight hundred pages each, denominated by him the 'Positive Philosophy.' In this sense Positivism hardly merits notice, for it does not now count over half a dozen proselytes among men of any repute as sober and earnest thinkers." . . .

It will be observed that Professor Bowen uses the terms "broad and comprehensive" (and the correlative term "narrow") in reference to *the doctrines* embraced in the system, and that these terms are employed in this essay in reference to *the men* who embrace the system. Accordingly Mr. Bowen's "broad and comprehensive" sense of the word Positivist is exactly equivalent to the "narrow" sense of the same word in the meaning given to the term "narrow" in this article, and *vice versâ*. It is manifestly, then, in Professor Bowen's "narrow" sense of the word, *i. e.* in the "broad and comprehensive sense" of that word as defined in this paper, that Positivism is to be dreaded, or at all events to be earnestly opposed, as formidable not only in itself but as making great headway in the world. Throwing overboard all Comte's trash, together with certain minor and affiliated speculations, "there still remains," says Professor Bowen, "a body of doctrine properly denominated Positivism in the narrower sense, which is, however, really of metaphysical origin and purport. its parentage in modern times being distinctly traceable to David Hume, from whom Comte borrowed it, and as usual in such cases, marred and disfigured it in the borrowing. Hume knew little or nothing about "natural history or physical science; he was a metaphysician pure and simple, a teacher of scepticism on metaphysical grounds. But his system was adopted and applied by Comte as, in a special sense, *the Philosophy of Physical Science*; and in this respect,

Comte has been followed, not only by such speculatists as John S. Mill, Herbert Spencer, and Mr. Lewes, but by a large and increasing number of naturalists and physicists, who, of course, only in this narrower sense are earnest and thorough-going Positivists. It is equally clear, that the system thus understood is not specially corroborated by their adhesion to it; for, as I have said, it does not rest upon physical, but upon metaphysical grounds. . . ." (*Ibid*, p. 266).

We think the accomplished Harvard Professor does some injustice (unintentionally, of course,) to the votaries of the system fashioned in its main details by Comte. It is hardly fair to regard the peculiar *religious* system of that writer as forming an integral part of his *philosophical* system. The *religious* system of Comte was a vagary of his declining years, and was promulgated in a work (*La Politique Positive*) bearing a wholly different title from that of his earlier and more famous publication. It is odd how extremes sometimes meet. The Absolute Idealism of Hegel and the Relative Materialism of Comte agree in attempting to reduce God to Zero and then recreate him in the form of an idol, or godling, named Man. It is a correct statement that the hierophant of this new *cultus* (for it was new in the shape given it by Comte) did not succeed in numbering many devotees, or even in making out a respectable catalogue of luke-warm adherents. It must not be forgotten, however, that congregations have been gathered for the purpose of worshipping man instead of God¹—and thus avowedly "serving the creature more than the Creator"—in Paris, in London, in New York, and possibly elsewhere. The anniversary, in 1879, of Comte's death, was duly observed in London; and a special service was held at the Posi-

¹ . . . "It is a merit of Auguste Comte to have recognised the necessity of some answer: and he tells us that it is our privilege and our business to love, reverence, and worship a 'being, immense and eternal—Humanity.' Not, mark you, a sinless and divine representative of the race, such as we Christians adore in the Incarnate Jesus, seated as He is at the right hand of the Father. Not even an idealized abstraction, which in pure realms of thought, might conceivably be separated from the weaknesses and degradations of the sum-total of human flesh

tivist Chapel, Holborn, and an address made by Dr. Richard Congreve—an enthusiastic and somewhat eminent disciple of the great founder. The smallness of the attendance, it is said, was unusual, and was attributed to a dissatisfaction that had manifested itself in certain quarters at the effort to introduce a liturgy into the ceremonial. We may, however, concede the paucity of these man-worshippers (and we rejoice to do so); but that is a very different thing from conceding the paucity or insignificance of Comte's system of philosophico-physical science. The adherents of Positivism in the limited sense (as regards the numbers and classes of persons embraced under the term,) the thinkers and writers who belong to the school of Comte properly so-called, are by no means to be despised. The late historian Buckle seems to have been one of them; and Grote, in his *History of Greece*, announces himself unambiguously in favour of Comte's doctrine of the three states of the human understanding. The late Mr. Mill and his entire following accept Comte's leadership and phraseology, and Professor Huxley has thought it worth his while to carry on a vigorous discussion with Mr. Frederic Harrison, one of the great champions of "Positivism" in their sense, in the columns of a well-known English periodical.

It is nevertheless sufficiently clear, that the distinguished logician and metaphysician of Harvard recognises at once a broad and a narrow definition of the term which is applied universally to the immediate and distinctive school of Comte, and applied more irregularly to a far wider circle of scientific and speculative writers.

We shall call but one other witness to the stand in reference to the current usage in relation to the extent of meaning to be

and blood. But this very collective human family itself, in all ages and of all conditions, viewed as one organism; this human family, not merely illuminated by its struggles, its sufferings, its victories, but also weighted with its crimes, its brutalities, its deep and hideous degradations. It might be thought that 'we men know man too well to care to worship him.' Yet, seriously, this is the god who is to supersede the Most Holy Trinity, when Positivism has won its way to empire in European thought.' Liddon's "Some Elements of Religion." Rivingtons, 1873, pp. 47, 48.

attached to the term; but it is one who will generally be admitted to be competent to pronounce on such a point, being no less a personage than Mr. William Harrell Mallock, the author of "Is Life Worth Living?" and "The New Republic." In an introductory note to that brilliant, and every way remarkable, though painfully unsatisfying, book, "Is Life Worth Living?" Mr. Mallock says:

"In this book the words '*positive*,' '*positivist*,' and '*positivism*,' are of constant occurrence as applied to modern thought and thinkers. To avoid any chance of confusion or misconception, it will be well to say that these words as used by me have no special reference to the system of Comte or his disciples, but are applied to the common views and position of the whole scientific school, one of the most eminent members of which—I mean Professor Huxley—has been the most trenchant and contemptuous critic that '*Positivism*' in its narrower sense has met with. Over '*Positivism*,' in this sense, Professor Huxley and Mr. Frederic Harrison have had some public battles. Positivism in the sense in which it is used by me, applies to the principles as to which the above writers explicitly agree, not to those as to which they differ."¹

Nothing can be plainer than the concord of Mr. Mallock and Professor Bowen as to the point in question. It will be remarked, however, that Mr. Mallock uses the word "narrow" as it is used in this article, and not in the sense in which it is employed by the Professor of Natural Theology and Moral Philosophy.

We have said enough to vindicate the popular acceptance of the disputable terms, and to point out the slender ground on which those terms can be disallowed by the sceptical *savans* of our day as fairly descriptive of the general school of thought to which most of them confessedly belong. It is, notwithstanding, always safest to curtail as much as possible the area of ambiguity in such matters. The term "positive" is furthermore (as has often been repeated) a misnomer even in application to Comte's "narrower" school, and equally so as to the wider school of scientific writers. The new science is not, distinctively considered, *positive* but *negative*; it is, indeed, as regards all intimate, all profound, all supreme knowledge, not a scheme of *science* at

¹"Is Life Worth Living?" G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1879, p. xxiii.

all, but simply one of *nescience*. We are willing then to take their own term, and to style all the men who assent to the fundamental principles of the general school "*Agnostics*." Even here we feel some degree of embarrassment; for certain of these very fastidious gentlemen are not unreasonably somewhat chary of the application of a term to *them* which may so easily be turned into the English, *Know-Nothings*,"—a phrase which, however accurate a translation, is not thought to be just as a description, and is supposed to have the air of being disrespectful. But we cannot help it. The designation is appropriate, comes (it is now claimed)¹ from one of themselves, has been widely adopted, avoids all ambiguity, and will be insisted on and employed in the remainder of the present essay. By the term "*Agnostics*" is sometimes denoted such of the "*Positivists*" in the wide sense as do not give in their adhesion to the entire complex system that is peculiar to Auguste Comte. By the term "*Agnostics*," we agree with Mr. Mallock (in his use of the word "*Positivists*") in understanding all, of every shade of opinion, who hold Comte's and Mr. Spencer's doctrine of "*The Unknowable*." It will be found that all such persons also hold Hume's doctrine as to the nature of causality, either as maintained by Hume himself, or as stated by Dr. Thomas Brown, or else as slightly modified by John Stuart Mill.² Some of them (as for instance, Mr. Spencer,) go altogether out of Comte's system for the fundamental support they would give to their positions, and buttress themselves up on the speculative conclusions of Sir Wm. Hamilton and the late Dean Mansel. The positions themselves which are thus supported are nevertheless included in the scheme of the erratic Frenchman. Indeed, it is not denied that the body of

¹The credit for this designation, as we have once before remarked in this REVIEW, has of late been given to Professor Huxley.

²"I agree, however, with Mr. Mansel in the opinion which he shares with Comte, James Mill, and many others, who see nothing in causation but invariable antecedence; . . ." Mill's Examination of Hamilton's Philosophy. Longmans, &c., 1867, p. 361. In his work on "*Positivism*," however, Mr. Mill asks leave (if our recollection is not at fault) to add to the word "*invariable*" the words "*and unconditional*."

tenets making up what is known as *La Philosophie Positive* embraces every characteristic feature of the reigning school of Agnosticism; but it embraces much more. It is then evident that the way to get at the *residuum* of belief which is held in common by the narrower, and the broader, school of Agnostics, is to eliminate from the series of Comte's fundamental positions those which are peculiar to the Comteian system, and then to retain the remainder. Comte's fundamental positions we take to have been the following:

First. The doctrine of the Three States of the Human Understanding, or three successive stages of human progress.

Second. The doctrine of Causality, advocated by Hume, which resolves the notion of *causation* into that of invariable antecedence.

Third. Hume's doctrine, that all our knowledge is derived from sensible experience.

Fourth. The doctrine, that the inquiry after first and final causes is necessarily fruitless, and that the philosopher must be content to ascertain and classify laws.

Fifth. The Hierarchy of the Sciences.

Now of these several positions, the first and last are the only ones that are peculiar to Comte and his immediate disciples. If then we proceed to eliminate the first and last of these statements, the core of the system will be found to have remained intact, and to consist of three propositions which are affirmed by none but Agnostics, and which all Agnostics affirm. These interior or central propositions are these:

First. Hume's Causality Doctrine.

Second. Hume's Experience Doctrine.

Third. Hume's Doctrine of the Futility of Searching for Ultimate Efficient and Final Causes: applied in a somewhat new way to the determination of the boundaries of physical and transcendental research. So that the controversy in its Briarean aspect virtually transforms itself into a single-handed rencounter with David Hume.

If we scrutinise these three propositions, it will be evident further

that *the core* of the entire system, big and little, whether as advocated by Comte or Mr. Spencer—by Mr. Harrison or Mr. Huxley—is the second proposition. To change the figure, the second of these propositions is the key-stone as well of the inner as of the outer arch. Grant the experience doctrine, and the causality doctrine, follows by course of logic. Again, grant the causality doctrine, and you have already virtually, because you have already logically, granted the doctrine of the inscrutability of ultimate efficiency and of supreme design—whether as regards their nature or their reality. In other words, in granting the causality doctrine, you have conceded premises from which is inevitably deduced the modern doctrine of the unknowable. But under our definition the man who maintains the doctrine of the unknowable is an Agnostic. It is therefore apparent that the discussion has been logically narrowed down to this, the truth or falsity of Hume's doctrine that all our knowledge is at last derived from experience, in Hume's sense of that word. And this is no new contest. The author of the "Treatise of Human Nature," although the subtlest adversary against whom Christianity has had to contend since the days of Porphyry and Celsus, and of Julian, if not the subtlest of all her adversaries, has been amply and repeatedly refuted. The truth is, Agnosticism has no logical basis on which to stand at all that has any longer more than a colorable show of validity. Hume himself has unwittingly but strikingly evinced this by denying, as it is notorious that he did deny, the validity (at any rate on the premises of Locke,¹ which are also the premises of the modern Agnostic) of *all* our knowledge. But if all our knowledge is invalid, then Hume's deductions are invalid, and Agnosticism which is shored up by Hume's reasoning is invalid.

We are, of course, aware, and have just stated, that a foundation has been sought for the new philosophy by Mr. Herbert Spencer in the speculations of Sir William Hamilton. In two

¹ . . . "But as a sceptical conclusion from the premises of previous philosophers, we have an illustrious example of Nihilism in Hume:" . . . Sir Wm. Hamilton, Lectures on Metaphysics, Wm. Blackwood & Sons, Vol. I., p. 294.

previous numbers of this REVIEW we have undertaken to show two things. The first of these was, that Hamilton's language is by no means free from ambiguity and has been differently understood by different writers of acknowledged perspicacity; and that no countenance is given to the Agnostic system in the teachings of Hamilton except on the assumption that the views of Hamilton on these points were identical with the views of his pupil and reverential admirer, Mansel, and that even then no conscious aid was afforded the Agnostics by either of those stalwart champions of the Christian faith, both of whom sedulously rejected the extreme and miserable sentiments which are now in vogue. The second thing we took it in hand to demonstrate (following the beaten path already marked out by J. S. Mill, Dr. John Young, Professor Calderwood, Mr. Martineau, and even Mr. Spencer himself,) was, not only that the cardinal thesis of Dr. Mansel, in his "Limits of Religious Thought" is precarious and dangerous to the cause of truth, but that it is logically indefensible and wholly untenable and erroneous.

To revert now to the averments which constitute Agnosticism, we shall do well to accept the representations of one of its very ablest as well as certainly one of its most lucid expounders, Mr. John Stuart Mill. Mr. Mill says: "We have no *knowledge* of anything but phenomena; and our knowledge of phenomena is relative, not absolute. We know not the essence, nor the real mode of production, of any fact, but only its relations, to other facts in the way of succession and similitude. These relations are constant; that is, always the same in the same circumstances. The constant resemblances which link phenomena together, and the constant sequences which unite them as antecedent and consequent, are termed their laws. All phenomena without exception, are governed by invariable laws, with which no volitions, either natural or supernatural, interfere. The essential nature of phenomena, and their ultimate causes, whether efficient or final, are unknown and inscrutable to us."¹ This perspicuous writer was analysing the principles underlying the Comteian positivism, in the narrow

¹Quoted in Bowen's "Modern Philosophy, pp. 266, 267."

sense; but we have seen that these principles lie at the heart and core of the entire Agnostics system. Professor Bowen therefore very naturally remarks that upon this showing Positivism is but another name for Empiricism; and that Huxley and Tyndall, Darwin and Helmholtz, ought not to refuse to lie down with Mill and Littré and Lewes, and even Harrison and Comte.¹ The Harvard Professor is right in saying that Mill's statement is a correct and fair statement of what is true in relation to Agnostic "science," as the Agnostics themselves understand the matter, and as people generally understand it.

In what remains of this paper we lay out to take a general view of Agnosticism, and to do what we can within these confined bounds to overthrow its title to intelligent credence. True, the sills and walls of this pretentious fabric have long ago been ready to crumble into what seemed to be irremediable ruin. True, the vast pile has before this been actually made to totter, sink, and fall; and has again and again been levelled with the dust. But error as well as truth, though not to the same extent as truth, when "crushed to earth, shall rise again." A logical overthrow is not always the same with an historical overthrow. But with every stroke of the logical battering-ram, advances are made towards the decisive historical catastrophe.

Our first argument against Agnosticism, is, that it is only true in partial sense that the system follows from its own premises. In so far as it is based on the Hamiltonian doctrine of the incogitable, we have already pointed out that the conclusions of Agnostic incredulity do not follow from the admission of its own postulates. But we now go further. From the premises so liberally furnished by Hume, a system of thorough-going Agnosticism does follow, but not the very insolent and very illogical system that passes current under the name. Agnosticism, as we have previously pointed out, may assume three forms. It may affirm God's existence, and deny the knowableness of God's nature. This is very nearly the position of Herbert Spencer (in terms at least); for he is continually asserting and insisting on the existence of the great

¹See Bowen's *Modern Philosophy*, p. 267. The general idea is Bowen's, the form of the thought, as well as the proper names, chiefly our own.

“Cause” or “Power” which is disclosed as an ultimate fact by the phenomena of the universe. Professor John Fisk, his acute American expounder, adopts the same view still more fully and unanimately. Another and more radical form of Agnosticism denies that we can know either the existence or the nature of God. Many who take this ground are probably real, though tacit, Atheists. There is no God known because there *is* no God to be known. In all other cases, and ostensibly in all cases, this form of Agnosticism is non-committal on the question of the fact, as well as of the question of the definition, of a God. This was theoretically the speculative attitude of Comte,¹ though he seems to have been individually an atheist, in his private opinion, and was latterly a man-deifier. This too, was about the usual attitude of Mr. Mill; and (except in his more exalted moments) appears to be the idea of Mr. Tyndall, and perhaps expresses the view of Professor Huxley.

Now the first form of Agnosticism is logically untenable on Agnostic principles. The affirmance of the fact of the Divine existence is only reasonable on Theistic grounds. If we cannot predicate *anything* of an ultimate *principium* of all things, we are, clearly, debarred from ascribing even reality to that *principium*. Much more are we debarred from ascribing to it causality and power. Equally is Mr. Spencer debarred from rejecting (as he does peremptorily) the hypothesis of the existence and attributes of the God of the Scriptures—under the travesty of what he denominates² “the Carpenter Theory” of the universe—and of adopting instead the theory of the current scientific materialism, or (if he prefers) the theory of realistic, or absolute, pantheism.³

¹ Mill in his “Positivism” is at pains to deny (much greater pains than Comte was at himself) that Comte was “a dogmatic Atheist.”

² “Alike in the rudest creeds and in the cosmogony long current among ourselves, it is assumed that the genesis of the heavens and the earth is effected somewhat after the manner in which a workman shapes a piece of furniture.” Herbert Spencer, “First Principles.” D. Appleton & Co., 1871, p. 33. Cf. Porter, Human Intellect, p. 659; who quotes the very phrase.

³ Materialism in its subtlest exhibition differs very little from the pantheism of Schelling or Strauss. “Seine Existenz als Wesen ist unser

With what semblance of rational propriety do these advocates of scientific (!) nescience (!) one and all declare (either in terms or by implication) that the infinite and absolute power is an impersonal principle? It is not a sufficient reply to say, that, although we do not know what the first cause *is*, we yet may know what the first cause is *not*. This is a sophistical evasion. If our ignorance of the nature of the first cause be total (and every form of Agnosticism asserts that this is so), there is plainly no room here either for affirmation or denial. Besides, the averment of the Divine existence coupled with the denial of the Divine personality, is logically equivalent to the positive enunciation of Pantheism. But the enunciation of pantheism is the enunciation of a theory which undertakes to solve the problem as to the nature of the first cause; and Agnosticism by its very definition is estopped from all inquiries in that direction. The contradiction is palpable and unavoidable.

The other and more subtle form of Agnosticism holds *sub judice* not only the question as to the nature, but also the question as to the existence, of a great first cause. This form of the negative philosophy, as well as the preceding, has been shown to have its main historical and argumentative foundation in the empirical principles of Hume.¹ But the flippant and aggressive scientific scepticism of our day is not a legitimate deduction from the premises. The conclusions of the scientific sceptics, belonging to what we may call "the Extreme Left" of contemporary thought are not justified by any of the laws of regular logical procedure. The most clear-headed of all the defenders of the general philosophic system now under review is John Stuart Mill. On Hume's principles we do not well see how Mill can be successfully dislodged. Mill defines matter as "a permanent possibility

Denken von ihm; aber seine reale Existenz ist die Natur, zu welcher das einzelne Denkende als Moment gehört."—Strauss, Gl. 1, §517. Quoted by Liddon.

¹Of course we have not forgotten that Hume in turn was the disciple of such men as Helvetius, Condillac, Hartley, Locke (as the sensationalists interpreted him), and Hobbes—who was himself a sinister reflex from Bacon and the Reformation; and Agnosticism is thus nothing but the lengthened shadow of the light shed upon the world by Luther and by Paul.

of sensation."¹ What he means by this odd language is that there is a permanent ground for the sensations which give us the impressions we have from time to time of the existence and qualities of material objects. In this sense Mill (though a sort of idealist) avows himself a believer in a material world. His notion is that there is such a place as the island of Madagascar; but only in the sense that whenever any one goes there he will have the same sensations, and consequently have the same conviction of the reality, shape, magnitude, and other properties of the island. The cause of these sensations is inscrutable, but it is permanent; it is, so far as we can judge, (in our profound ignorance of such mysteries,) simply the fixed fact, or certainty, that the required sensations will be invariably produced in the possible circumstances imagined. Against such a refined hypothesis as the one just stated, as Mill himself keenly indicates,² the *argumentum baculinum* of knocking a stick against the ground is of no avail even when the stick is in such hands as those of Dr. Johnson. Sir William Hamilton never reasoned in that way. "He never supposed that a disbeliever in what he means by matter, ought in consistency to act in any different mode from those who believe in it. He knew that the belief on which all the practical consequences depend, is the belief in permanent possibilities of sensation, and that if nobody believed in a material universe in any other sense, life would go on exactly as it now does. . . ." (Mill's Examination, p. 228.) This very able writer then proceeds to extend the hypothesis cautiously and modify it so as to lead to an analogous definition of *mind*, viz., that it is (or rather "may be") "merely a possibility of feelings." (*Ibid.*, p. 237.) If this view is correct, he goes on to inquire, "if . . . my mind is but a series of feelings, or, as it has been called, a thread of consciousness, however supplemented by believed possibilities of consciousness which are not, though they might be, realised; if this is all that mind, or myself, amounts to," what evidence do we have of the existence of our fellow-creatures; of

¹ See Mill's Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy, p. 227. Longmans & Co., London, 1867.

² *Ibid.*, p. 228.

a hyper-physical world; of God; of immortality? Dr. Reid unhesitatingly responds, We have none. Here, Mill contends, Reid committed a signal blunder; and urges that whatever evidence for each of the three points there is on the ordinary theory, is matched by exactly the same evidence on the theory which he maintains. (*Ibid.*, p. 236.) Daring and untenable as this speculation is, we venture to reproduce once more the remarkable words of its author: "As the theory leaves the evidence of the existence of my fellow-creatures exactly as it was before, so does it also with that of the existence of God. Supposing me to believe that the Divine mind is simply the series of the Divine thoughts and feelings prolonged through eternity, that would be, at any rate, believing God's existence to be as real as my own. And as for evidence, the argument of Paley's Natural Theology, or, for that matter, of his Evidences of Christianity, would stand exactly where it does." (*Ibid.*, p. 239.) "Again, the arguments for Revelation undertake to prove by testimony, that within the sphere of human experience works were done requiring a greater than human power, and words said requiring a greater than human wisdom. These positions, and the evidences of them, neither lose nor gain anything by our supposing that the wisdom only means wise thoughts and volitions, and that the power means thoughts and volitions followed by imposing phenomena." (*Ibid.*, p. 240.) It will be observed that Mill does not here announce what were his private sentiments as to the existence of a God. He, however, distinctly and explicitly admits that on Agnostic principles, and even on his own peculiar idealistic principles, there *may* be just as much reality about the existence and operations of a God as there is about our own. If so, at least so far as all practical purposes are concerned, we might reconstruct *in posse* the entire Christian scheme of the New Testament. The single point reserved for settlement (with regard to which Mill favors us with his own opinions and conjectures) is a metaphysical question relating to the intimate constitution of all being. But on Agnostic principles all such subtle metaphysical questions are incapable of solution. On Agnostic principles, then, the Theistic, rather than the Pantheistic or Atheistic, so-

VOL. XXXII., NO 3.—2.

lution may be after all the one which corresponds with the reality of the case, although of course on Agnostic principles we are precluded by the limits of the human mind from ever finding out the *fact*. The sum is, that on Agnostic principles an humble and tolerant silence on religious questions, or else the most modest suggestions in the way of surmise or guess-work, is the only attitude which befits our men of reason; that on Agnostic principles Theism is just as likely to be in accordance with the facts, as Pantheism or Atheism; even though on those principles neither scheme may be formulated into a system of dogmatic science.

Our second argument, however, against Agnosticism, is, that its premises are untenable and false, and its general conclusion unwarrantable and monstrous. The first point under this head scarcely demands an elaborate discussion at our hands. The special propositions derived from Mansel, on which Mr. Spencer builds so largely, have already been considered in these pages, in a former article on that subject. But, as we have seen abundantly, the only logical ground-work for the entire fabric of Agnosticism is the empirical philosophy of Hume; and surely, at this stage of metaphysical science, it is hardly incumbent on us, and it is certainly not our intention in the present article, to go over all that thread-bare argument. If Hume's empiricism be "*la vraie vérité*," we are landed at once in the absurd contradiction that there is no truth at all, or none that can be known to be such. For if Hume's doctrine be the true one, there is no such thing as intuitive judgments, or intuitive judgments that are valid. But every process of reasoning aims at the production of mental certainty, and must, if not worthless, terminate in a final and decisive act of judgment. But this judgment, although the result of a discursive process, must, from the very nature of the case, be itself intuitive, and consequently invalid. It follows that Hume's didactic position, that all our knowledge is derived ultimately from sensible experience, leads remorselessly to Hume's sceptical position of the invalidity of all human knowledge. It might therefore have been argued under the preceding head that the Agnostic argument proves nothing, or it proves too much;

conducting us, as it has been shown that it does, to stark Pyrrhonism.

The point we make now is that premises which thus logically conduct us to untenable conclusions, according to the accepted canons which regulate the operations of the thinking faculty, must themselves be false. It is an absurd and almost laughable spectacle that is presented to rational beings by an empirical sceptic engaged in *argument* in favor of any proposition whatever: and the only palliation of his fatuous conduct that is possible can only be pleaded in certain cases, and is due to the circumstance that no matter what the conclusion may be, it is confessedly a doubtful one, and one which is not put forward in any other than a conjectural sense. It is, however, almost equally absurd (viewed from the same standing-point) to *argue with* the empirical sceptic. If all argument presupposes the existence and authority of the primary beliefs, or judgments, or notions, or cognitions, and their intuitive validity, it would appear to be impossible to engage in argument with the empirical sceptic without begging the very point in dispute. But that point ought never to be allowed to be imperilled by debate. The empirical philosopher has virtually surrendered his ground by entering the arena of discussion. As he has of his own option taken up the sword of argument, it is his righteous doom to perish by the sword of argument. The very notion, however, of such a contest is in itself preposterous. There must be a beginning as well as an end of all controversy.¹ There can be no race, or journey, that does not have a starting point as well as a goal. There can be no such a thing as a valid, or even sane, logic, without the original and authoritative assertion of the logical faculty, the mind, itself as to what is true

¹ . . . I should reply, that there are, and must be, in human nature, some original grounds of belief, beyond which our researches cannot proceed, and of which therefore it is vain to attempt a rational account." Campbell's *Dissertation on Miracles*, London, 1834, p. 18. See also the same familiar proposition admirably elucidated in the tenth chapter of Dabney's *Sensualistic Philosophy of the Nineteenth Century*. Also see Porter, pp. 501, 502, for the true meaning of the description "first truths" or "primitive judgments"; as referring not to the order of time but of logical importance.

and false. But when this is once admitted, the debate, which should never have been begun, is brought to a peremptory termination. The only satisfactory method with the empirical sceptic is to convince him of the imperious sovereignty of the law of causation, as a law of objective no less than subjective validity, and of the intuitive certainty that every change is an effect, and that every effect must have not merely an *antecedent*, and not merely a cause in the secondary sense, but a first efficient and supreme final cause.¹ The vindication of Theism as against Agnosticism, then, so far as the truth of the premises is involved, is the same thing with the vindication of the intuitive philosophy as against empiricism, and of the true doctrine of causality as against the doctrine of mere priority or antecedence.

If we thought it desirable at this time to invade the lists of this contention and attack the fundamental principles on which the empirical philosophy is based, it would be easy to make good the assertion that the logic by which the empirical conclusions are drawn from the premises is not more faulty (indeed is scarcely so faulty) as is the metaphysics on which those premises themselves depend for their support. Empiricism in one of its extreme forms (as we have seen) would get rid of metaphysics altogether, as Comte attempted to do in the construction of his scheme of graduated sciences. But empiricism in all its forms, as has been abundantly evinced, rests upon a purely metaphysical foundation. What remains to be said on this point is, that the metaphysics underlying the empirical system is partly good and partly bad metaphysics; that in so far as it is good, it has no tendency whatever, when properly viewed, to sustain the allegations of the empirical sceptic, but on the contrary, has a fatal and overwhelming tendency to destroy them; and that in so far as the metaphysics is bad, the tendency, though favorable to the sceptic, is,

¹After all the disturbance made about it by such men as Darwin and Huxley, the explicit denial of final causes is no novelty in the world: it is as old as Lucretius:

“Nil . . . natum est in corpore, ut uti

Possemus: sed, quod natum est, id procreat usum.”

See Porter's sixth chapter and McCosh on “Positivism and Christianity,” for an adequate vindication.

from the nature of the case, wholly nugatory. The last part of this comprehensive statement is self-evident. If the first part of the statement be true, the inference is unavoidable that the sound metaphysics which is presupposed by the system of those who advocate the experience doctrine affords no justification for that system, but does afford the means by which the system may be triumphantly refuted. But it is conceded that the empirical philosophy denies the validity of the primary and intuitive judgments or beliefs. This *dictum*, however, of the empirical philosophy is manifestly at war with all sound metaphysics. The averment, therefore, which was just now made conditionally, may be made absolutely, and is true and incontestable, viz., that empiricism can find no refuge in sound metaphysics, but only a grave of logical destruction. That metaphysics rests on intuitive or *a priori* beliefs we say is manifest. This is true, as has over and over again been pointed out, of *all* sciences, even of the physical sciences, in which Agnostic empiricism makes its chief boast. This is fully admitted by the acknowledged masters of those sciences themselves, as for instance notably by Lavoisier, in a passage quoted and seemingly endorsed by Mr. Huxley.¹ The science of chemistry, for example, assumes the indestructibility of matter, and physics the uniform operation of gravity and other natural laws. This point was strongly presented by Campbell in his reply to Hume.² The very process of generalisation, from which every part of natural science derives its being, depends on the validity of memory and of the consciousness of personal identity. It has moreover been admirably shown, by Professor Bowen³ and others, that metaphysics is the only science which does not borrow its own postulates; and, the Harvard logician might have added, does not borrow those postulates *from* meta-

¹See Bowen's "Modern Philosophy," p. 269.

²See "A Dissertation on Miracles: Containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Esq., in an Essay on Miracles," etc. By George Campbell, D. D., Principal of the Marischal College, Aberdeen. London. 1834. Part I., Section I.

³"Modern Philosophy," p. 168. Descartes compares the entire mass of human knowledge to a tree, of which metaphysics are the root, physics are the trunk, and the other sciences the branches.

physics: for by the very terms of the definition metaphysics is the science which treats of the first principles of *all* the sciences.

The only pretence of argument that has been put forward to sustain the empirical thesis (except the psychological one already considered), is that "science" in point of fact never has ascertained, and from the nature of the case obviously never can hope to ascertain, the reality of distinctively spiritual phenomena. The scalpel can never cut deep enough to reach the soul. All this we admit, if by "science" is meant material or physical science. The fallacy here is *ignoratio elenchi*. If, however, the term "science" be taken broadly, the argument flagrantly begs the question. The empirical reasoning is thus founded on a wretched and palpable sophism.

But it is not our purpose to go into the argument with the empirical philosophers. As in mathematics, so here: when a thing has been once established, it may afterwards be taken for granted. Otherwise "science" would never advance. Now, if anything ever has been notoriously established, and established *usque ad nauseam*, it is the falsity of the whole empirical groundwork and pretension.¹ It is not necessary to repeat the demonstration. Who would ever think of rearguing the earlier theorems of Legendre or Euclid? If it were judged best, however, to reopen the question with those astute sceptics, the limits of the present essay would not mark off a suitable field for the discussion. Happily all that is needed for the purposes of the present article is to prick the bubble of Agnosticism; and that bubble has been effectually pricked when Agnosticism has been shown to be but a disguise for materialistic atheism, or but another name for empirical scepticism; and thus nothing but a revival in a new and specious garb of the ancient and exploded dogmas of Democritus and Pyrrhon. Such has been the limited contention of the present argumentative effort.

¹See, for example, Morell's History of Modern Philosophy, Chapters I. and IV., and the main argument in Dabney's Sensualistic Philosophy, and in McCosh's "Philosophy of the Intuitions"; also McCosh's "Defence of Fundamental Truth," *passim*. See too the masterly discussion in the first chapter of the fourth part of Porter's Human Intellect.

Having thus pointed out that the Agnostic reasoning is in violation of the plainest laws of the science of logic, and the Agnostic premises in glaring conflict with the first principles of the sciences of psychology and metaphysics, it is time that we should protest against the Agnostic *conclusion*, regarded in the light of its own intrinsic and monstrous absurdity as judged at once by reason and by revelation, by common sense and ethics as well as by theology. In the story of the Rosicrucians that is retold by Addison in one of the *Spectators*, the gigantic stone man rose up, as the adventurer, who had penetrated into the recesses of a mysterious cavern, approached him, and at length lifted his stone mace and with a terrific noise extinguished the lamp that had been the sole illumination. This is a true image. There is, as we admitted in our previous articles, a genuine and even a Biblical Agnosticism. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." There are undoubtedly very narrow boundaries to human thought. Philosophy itself has been defined by one of its greatest adepts to be "a learned ignorance." But against the pseudo-Agnosticism that built the Athenian altar to the Unknown God, and that now essays to lift its arm against the only light which is shining in the midst of the universal darkness, we would cry out in accents of alarm and warning. The reader of these pages no doubt remembers the stately and imposing terms in which Edmund Burke arraigned the culprit governor of India for his crimes and misdemeanors before the bar of the House of Commons. Were we masters of the same impressive eloquence, we should not hesitate to bring a similar arraignment against this gigantic and destructive system of imposture, fortified as it is, and rendered all but impregnable as it may seem to be, by so much of the so-called "science" of this superficial age. Nor shall we draw back from our duty because we cannot summon to our aid the lofty station and imperial genius of the English prosecutor. We not only oppose the basis of Agnosticism as a philosophic system, we arraign that system for high crimes and misdemeanors. We arraign it for its transparent shams and arrant hypocrisy. We arraign it for assuming the costume and the modulated accents of a friendly neutral, when in reality it is a deadly foe. We arraign it for coming like Joab

with words of amity, and then seeking to thrust its glittering weapon under the fifth rib. We arraign it as guilty of the *odium humani generis*. We arraign it as the enemy of man and God. We arraign it for its virtual or outright denial of all that gives value to the life here or hereafter; for its virtual denial of a God, of the soul, of immortality itself; for its outright or virtual denial of the ill-desert, and even of the existence, of sin; for its outright and even insolent denial of the Day of Judgment, of the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. We arraign Agnosticism as that portentous and malignant spirit which, as if in some blind phrensy, would pull down the pillars of Cosmos and bury the creation all in ruin—remanding it back to the realm and sovereignty of “chaos and old night”; nay, as that arch-criminal which under pretence of blindness, but with acutest vision, aims to blot out the Sun of Righteousness in the mid-firmanent and shroud the heavens of salvation with a pall of Cimmerian darkness; and which, if its fell designs could be accomplished, would gladly put an end to that blessed religion that one of the most gifted worldlings of the nineteenth century has pronounced “the last restraint of the powerful and the last hope of the wretched.”

HENRY C. ALEXANDER.