

## MISCELLANEOUS.

### A NEW WORK ON COMTE.

No French philosopher of the present century has exercised so great an influence beyond the boundary of his country as Auguste Comte. His system met with its first success in England and Holland. John Stuart Mill, Spencer, George Lewes, George Eliot, and a considerable number of other English thinkers and authors were more or less largely inspired by it. The religion of humanity which it promulgated is represented even to-day by societies in England, (at the head of which stands Mr. Frederick Harrison), and in the Latin states of both Europe and South America there exist positivist societies which are more enthusiastic for Comte's religion than were any of his followers during his lifetime. Even in Germany, the influence of his philosophy has been felt. The scientific sociology of to-day has proceeded directly from it. Scientific psychology is also in some measure its product, while the theories of "psychological moment" and of the biological and sociological "environment" which have been so richly elaborated by such authors as Taine, were almost entirely due to his applications of the principles of Lamarck to the doctrines of Montesquieu. In fine, whatever may be the fate of Comte's system, it is certainly the expression of one of the most characteristic tendencies of the present century, and we are glad that we have at last a competent and adequate exposition of his dominant ideas from the pen of a critical and impartial historian, M. L. Lévy-Bruhl, of the *École des Sciences Politiques*, and of the University of Paris. This writer is neither an adherent nor an opponent of Comte's philosophy, and he has accordingly performed his task in the same unimpassioned and unpolemical manner as if he were writing of Aristotle or of Descartes.<sup>1</sup>

M. Lévy-Bruhl regards philosophical systems not only as the creations of individual minds, but also as products of their times and countries. Comte's period was that immediately succeeding the French Revolution. The question of the day was that of "social reorganisation," which occupied the thoughts of nearly every French thinker, as Fouillée, Saint-Simon, Joseph DeMaistre, and which also gave the first impulse to the writers on socialism in Germany and other countries. "The nineteenth century," says Von Ranke, "is pre-eminently a century of reconstruction." The "critical" period had passed, the "organic" period had come. "Social reorganisation" was also the task to which Comte set himself, but he differed from the other reformers of his period in demanding that reasoned opinion should be the groundwork of reform, that rational philosophy should be the basis of so-

<sup>1</sup> *La philosophie d'Auguste Comte*, par L. Lévy-Bruhl. Paris: Félix Alcan, 108 Boulevard Saint-Germain. 1900. Pages, 417. Price, 7 francs 50.

ciology and ethics. Every new project was in vain, he contended, unless founded upon some such general system of opinions and convictions as were the Catholic dogmas of the Middle Ages. Comte began, therefore, as a philosopher. He, too, desired to found a social, a "political" system, but it was to be primarily scientific, that is, "positive," and it was to repose on an ethics and a philosophy likewise "positive." From the first his life was but the methodical execution of this plan. M. Lévy-Bruhl sees no break of continuity in its development, as some writers have since. To him, Comte's career, said at the beginning to have been that of an Aristotle and at the end that of a Saint Paul, answered perfectly to the beautiful definition given in reply to the question: *Qu'est-ce qu'une grande vie? Une pensée de la jeunesse, exécutée par l'âge mûr.* The positive *philosophy* thus was merely preparatory to the positive *religion*, was its "indispensable preamble." That preamble, of researches in mathematics, astronomy and the physical sciences, the natural sciences, biology, psychology, and sociology, lasted twenty-eight years. When the crowning work came, the old generation had passed away, and the new turned a deaf ear to his supplications. The religion of humanity has now virtually met the fate that all similar systems have. The thought of Comte's youth and of his maturity alone remains; the dream of his old age has melted away, leaving but a few racks behind. To Comte's philosophy and science, therefore, M. Lévy-Bruhl devotes his book, not to his religion, and of the former, the reader may be assured that he will find here a faithful picture.

T. J. McC.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE ON CHINA BY A CHINAMAN.<sup>1</sup>

*To the Editor of The Open Court:*

At present we are in the midst of an intellectual revolution. Owing to the efforts of reformers like K'ang Yue Wei and Liang Chi Ch'ao, the whole literary classes of China are at last aroused from their former stupor and lethargy, and we may hope to see some tangible results in the near future. The object of the Reform party is at present the restoration of the legitimate Emperor to power, and they believe that when this is accomplished an era of reform and progress will be duly inaugurated. They are at last appealing to the national spirit in the race and must therefore succeed ultimately. Practically, however, they have not accomplished much beyond frightening the Empress Dowager into withdrawing her decree for establishing a new reign with the advent of the current year. This is, however, a great deal to any one who understands Chinese institutions and the autocratic self-will of the Empress Dowager. K'ang is now a refugee here, like Voltaire on the shores of Lake Lemman, thundering against Mandarin corruption, oppression, and ignorance. For this reason the reward offered for his head is now Tls. 140,000. To my mind, however, his reform schemes appear too revolutionary and unpractical. Contrary to Confucius, he is striving after the distant and the high instead of the near and the lowly. When he had the Emperor's ear, if instead of abolishing certain old established departments he had advised the abolition of such an obnoxious custom as the "Kowtow"; if instead of recommending the confiscation of all temples throughout the Empire for use as schools, he had contented himself with the founding of a single really useful educational institution; if instead of creating a new fleet and building railways, he had interested himself

<sup>1</sup>The author of this letter is a scholar who is exceptionally well versed in Western civilization. Not having permission to use his name, we omit his signature.