

The standard work of Professor Lévy-Bruhl on the Philosophy of Comte, published in 1900, is now made accessible to English readers in a very good translation (Putnam). The book is an admirable example of clear and sympathetic exposition from the standpoint neither of the thick-and-thin disciple nor of the critic of the Positive Philosophy. The result is that we have an account which perhaps is truer to the real spirit of Positivism than any other that is available. Without advancing extreme claims (it is admitted, for example, that Comte is quite beyond the mark in his estimate of the importance and finality of his concrete contributions to the science of sociology), the author succeeds in showing that many of the traditional difficulties that have been found in Comte's system fail to get fully at the motives and logic of his thought. The supposed inconsistency between his earlier philosophy and his "second career," or religious period, it is argued, does not exist at all. So the criticisms that have been passed upon the classification of the sciences, the attitude toward psychology, the admission of the idea of progress, the failure to attempt a preliminary investigation of the nature of knowledge, and other similar objections, were all, it is pointed

out, anticipated by Comte himself ; and his position is shown to be at least the only logical consequence of his point of view. On the whole, a reading of the book, even by those who find it impossible to stop with the Positive Philosophy, will hardly fail to arouse anew a sense of the fertility, in spite of its aberrations, of Comte's genius, and of the immense value of the ideas for which he stood. That the positive spirit as interpreted by Comte, when taken as a final attitude toward the universe, does not meet all the needs of the human spirit, one may perhaps still be permitted to believe fifty years after the death of its great Apostle. Why Comte should have been so ready to reject certain interests as futile, should have been so limited in his sympathies along certain lines, the present volume helps to explain by its emphasis of the nature of the soil in which his thought took shape, and the unsatisfactory character of those forms of the tendencies he opposed with which he was most familiar. But while the completeness of his interpretation of the nature of human experience may be questioned, there can be no doubt of either the theoretical or the practical importance of the aspect which he brought chiefly to view. The disciplining of the imagination which Positivism involves, the reverence for concrete fact and law, the recognition of the essentially progressive nature of truth, and the distrust of finality and dogmatism, the wholesome orientating of thought by the ideal of human welfare, are elements of a temper of mind which is still far too rare in our life and education, and the social need of which can hardly be over-emphasized.