

(b) Differing from these novelists and essayists, yet closely allied to them in their opposition to all distinctive Christian truth, we have a school of scientific thinkers who bring to their task a multifarious if not accurate knowledge, and who are essentially polemical rather than sentimental. We refer to the small but increasing school of philosophical historians and critics who have named their system *POSITIVISM*. Among those who have exerted themselves to transplant the ideas of Comte into English soil we may mention Lewes and Buckle as representing the critical historians, and John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer and Alexander Bain as representing the philosophical critics. These philosophers may indeed be regarded as simply atheists, but it is impossible to overlook their influence as indicating the drift of modern speculation in philosophy, which is ever coming into contact with theology, and which, under the guise of liberal thought and philosophical criticism, is continually pressed upon our attention. This positivism claims to supersede all previous systems of philosophy, to be the final result and climax of all previous speculations, and to subject every branch of human learning and activity to the criticism of its remorseless positivity. Thoroughly materialistic in its character, it formulates results and calls them laws; beyond this it discards all knowledge and repudiates its possibility. It professes only to know phenomena and these not fully—their essential nature and their ultimate cause are alike unknown and inscrutable. It is a rigid system of secularism, restricting human thoughts to the interests of the present life, and accounting all doctrinal religion superstition. These philosophers sometimes call Christianity divine, but by this they mean nothing more than that it is a portion of the great mundane evolution, divine in the sense that all things are divine. They exclude from the domain of possible knowledge the doctrine alike of efficient and final causes; the idea of God the Creator is by them banished from the field of science; Providence is to them an absurd dogma; the true conception of history is a thing of cold algebraical laws and sequences from which we must exclude all idea of a divine and ever working purpose. These extreme, reckless and desperate conclusions are evolved from assumed