

It is only on second thoughts we realize that, given certain conditions of the mental atmosphere, it requires no mean courage to be on the conservative or prudent side ; that there is little danger in running the gauntlet of criticism when one has popularity on one's side ; and that we all, more or less, have occasionally notions which we know are brilliant and might be dazzling if we chose to give them expression, but which, as Charlotte Brontë said, we feel we had better keep to ourselves.

In fact all those famous writers appear to-day to have been unduly advanced on some points, and several of them (as I shall have occasion to repeat) became aware of it themselves.

To begin with the philosophers, it was a good thing to rise above the shallow eclecticism of Cousin, who imagined he could build a philosophy by borrowing a bit from one philosopher, a bit from another, or above the Scottish School, who never went beyond psychology ; and it was more than advisable to take into account all the positive facts and laws ascertained by modern science before endeavouring to lay down metaphysical principles : all this Littré, Comte and Taine did with much method, erudition, insight, and, one may even say, with genius. But it is no less true that to-day these philosophers appear not only belated but hurtful. They disbelieved all spiritual realities, and the result was that crude readers inferred materialism from their works. Thousands of so-called positivists of all degree denied the existence of the soul because Littré and Taine said that soul-phenomena were not scientifically ascertainable, or the existence of free-will because Taine had written that ' virtue and vice are products like sugar or vitriol ', an irrefutable statement when properly understood, but dangerously easy to misunderstand.