

**THE POSITIVIST
LIBRARY OF
AUGUSTE COMTE**

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The Positivist Library of Auguste Comte by Frederic Harrison

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FREDERIC HARRISON

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24

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OF

AUGUSTE COMTE.



TRANSLATED AND EDITED

BY

FREDERIC HARRISON.



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PREFACE.

IN October, 1851, AUGUSTE COMTE published a list of Books for general reading, which he called *The Positivist Library in the Nineteenth Century*. It consists of about 270 distinct compositions, by about 140 authors. His purpose was, "to guide the more thoughtful minds among the people in their choice of books for constant use." He thought that intellect and moral character suffer grievously from ill-directed reading; and his aim was to present, within limits accessible to all educated men, a collection of works of permanent value for habitual use. In this, as throughout the whole of his teaching, may be seen his leading idea, that all intellectual training should have a synthetic character, and should serve to cultivate the whole nature. It was designed as one of the instruments by which education might be ultimately reorganized.

The conditions of such a sketch should always be borne in mind. It was avowedly provisional; it was meant for the present century; and it is liable to revision. Moreover, it is now thirty-five years old, and more than two-thirds of the time for which it was designed has passed. It was not directly intended for any one European nation; and it has no literary, no special character. Lastly, the author warns us that it is not meant to exclude, but rather to suggest. It is no part of his object to stereotype litera-

ture, or to interfere with the development of any special knowledge.

A collection of this kind, a Library of general education, must be confined to moderate limits, and it necessarily omits many books of supreme beauty and value. Thus each nation in turn may miss many of its most popular and characteristic works. But one of the objects of the author was to counteract the exclusive spirit of nationality and the engrossing interest of modern times. An acquaintance with our national and modern authors is often purchased at the cost of entire ignorance of the noblest works of other ages and other languages. It was the main idea of this selection to awaken attention to the typical works of other nations and times, so as to bring out the essential elements that each has contributed in the life of Humanity. The Library, like the Calendar, of Comte is thoroughly representative; it seeks to impress on the mind of our age the characteristic qualities of various types of civilization and of human energy and thought.

The standard of choice is not the absolute one of literary merit. Many an admirable work of genius is omitted; either because its place is otherwise filled, or because, like *Pantagruel*, *Gulliver*, and *Don Juan*, it cannot be held to work for edification. On the other hand, some books are included, although not of the first rank of literary excellence, since they present us something indispensable and not otherwise found, or they conveniently collect a useful set of observations. It would have been contrary to the first object of a collection, European in character, and popular in its design, either to include books of mere local celebrity, or to omit the typical books of any leading nation.

The works in the first and the fourth sections only, the Poets and the Philosophers, retain permanent hold on mankind. Even in those sections the progress of literary culture may possibly modify judgments formed in Paris nearly forty years ago, especially in the department of the primitive poetry of Europe and of the East. Manuals of science and history, several of which appear in the second

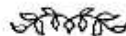
and third sections, are naturally in course of constant improvement; some of those mentioned in the list are already superseded by better, and others are quite obsolete. Scientific and historical text-books belong to special countries and generations and are easily found. But in the system of Comte the earliest works on science and history have a value of their own, as recording progress and keeping in sight the elements of the subject. It is the habit of our age to attach a rather exaggerated value to the latest novelty in research. Geometry, astronomy, physics, and chemistry are not really reconstructed anew every few years; and the editing of some neglected manuscripts does not amount to a revolution in historical knowledge.

It will be seen by those who take the trouble to study the somewhat obsolete manuals which are found in the sections of Science and History, that they have a comprehensive and synthetic character which is very rarely met with in our analytic and specializing methods of study to-day. Books such as those of Fischer on *Physics*, of Richerand on *Physiology*, of Duméril on *Natural History*, or, again, Malte-Brun's *Geography*, Heeren's *Manuals*, and the like, though not now in ordinary use, and in many respects obsolete, are based upon systematic conceptions of their respective subjects which are not often found in the modern text-books presenting an immense accumulation of special details.

Such a list as that of Comte would cease to have any use, it would indeed be full of mischief, if it were taken in any absolute or intolerant spirit. It appears from the Calendar and other writings of Comte, that the Library is not designed as a comparative judgment of authors, or as necessarily condemning those who are not included. The Calendar contains the names of more than ninety poets, of whom little more than fifty are found in the Library. The names of Euripides and Lucretius appear in the Calendar, as do those of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Rabelais, Bunyan, Swift, Lessing, Schiller, and Sterne; but for various reasons their works are not recommended for constant perusal. Catullus is certainly superior as a poet to

Tibullus, and Lucretius to Ovid; but the subject and manner of those great poets may probably have seemed less suitable for general reading. Comte, it is clear, placed the highest value on the philosophic work of Plato, Aquinas, Hobbes, Vico, Montesquieu, Leibnitz, Kant, and Adam Smith; and in science on that of Kepler, Galileo, Harvey, Newton, and D'Alembert; but there are good reasons why their writings, however indispensable to human thought, should not be included in any educational list. On the other hand, compilations like those of Malte-Brun, Rienzi, Heeren, Richerand, Duméril, Fischer, Meckel, Carr, and Graham have no extraordinary merit, nor any permanent value.

The Catalogue as a whole is intended as a type of what a synthetic view of education requires, and as a summary of the best that exists in various languages and ages. Few men living would feel themselves competent to prepare a selected Library in all departments of science and literature, of all ages and languages. M. Pierre Laffitte has declined to revise or complete the list; and the present editor has no intention of undertaking the task. A few explanatory notes, with remarks as to translations and editions, have been added. The editor has received a considerable body of information from M. Laffitte, the friend and disciple of Comte, as to the works which he mainly had in view where the name of a voluminous author is given alone. Many notes and memoranda in Comte's handwriting exist in his library, and from these in some cases the selections have been given here. In other cases the authority is the recollection of M. Laffitte, or his own belief, derived from his continual intercourse with Comte, of what it was his intention to recommend for habitual use.



NOTE.



THE following list is taken from the fourth volume of Comte's *Politique Positive*, 1854. It is the only list published by Comte himself. In the editor's notes will be found such additions or omissions as were introduced after Comte's death from memoranda left by him. The books indicated were in some cases described by Comte under a general title. In this edition a translation of the actual title has been given. In the third section, that of History, for some unknown reason, the works were given in inverse chronological order, although in the other parts of the Library, in the Calendar, and in all of Comte's historical writings, the chronological order is observed. It has been restored in this translation. Comte's own view of the Library is set forth in *Pos. Pol.* iv. 236, 351-353. This, and all other references to the *Positive Polity*, are taken from the English translation, 4 vols. (Longmans), 1875.

When the date of a book is given, it is the date of the first publication. Where several dates are given, they indicate the editions and translations.

"*Var. Ed.*" (Various editions) means that the book is common and has been often reprinted. "*Rare*" means comparatively rare to the ordinary reader, or not to be obtained without search. Of the older books and translations, copies can only be occasionally met with, often at very low prices. But nearly all the books in this list are commonly to be seen on the shelves of the book-dealers in London and Paris. The date will usually indicate the probability of finding a book in ordinary circulation.

The well-known series of Bohn's Libraries (G. Bell and Sons) contains fifty-three of these works, mostly translations.

The series of the Chandos Classics (Warne and Co.) contains fourteen of the works.

Many of the others will be found in the Globe series (Macmillan), and in the cheap Libraries issued by Messrs. Cassell, Ward and Lock, Warne, and Routledge.

The *Bibliothèque Populaire* (Paris) contains very many of these works in French (2½*d.* per volume). The works in this list are now collected in the Libraries of Newton Hall and of Chapel Street. They were mainly the gift of Dr. Joseph Kaines, to whom I am under obligations for much assistance in these notes, and whose excellent Lectures on the Library are published by Reeves and Turner, price 6*d.*

