

**COMTE  
AND MILL**

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Comte and Mill by Thomas Whittaker

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**THOMAS WHITTAKER**

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AND MILL**



# COMTE AND MILL

By

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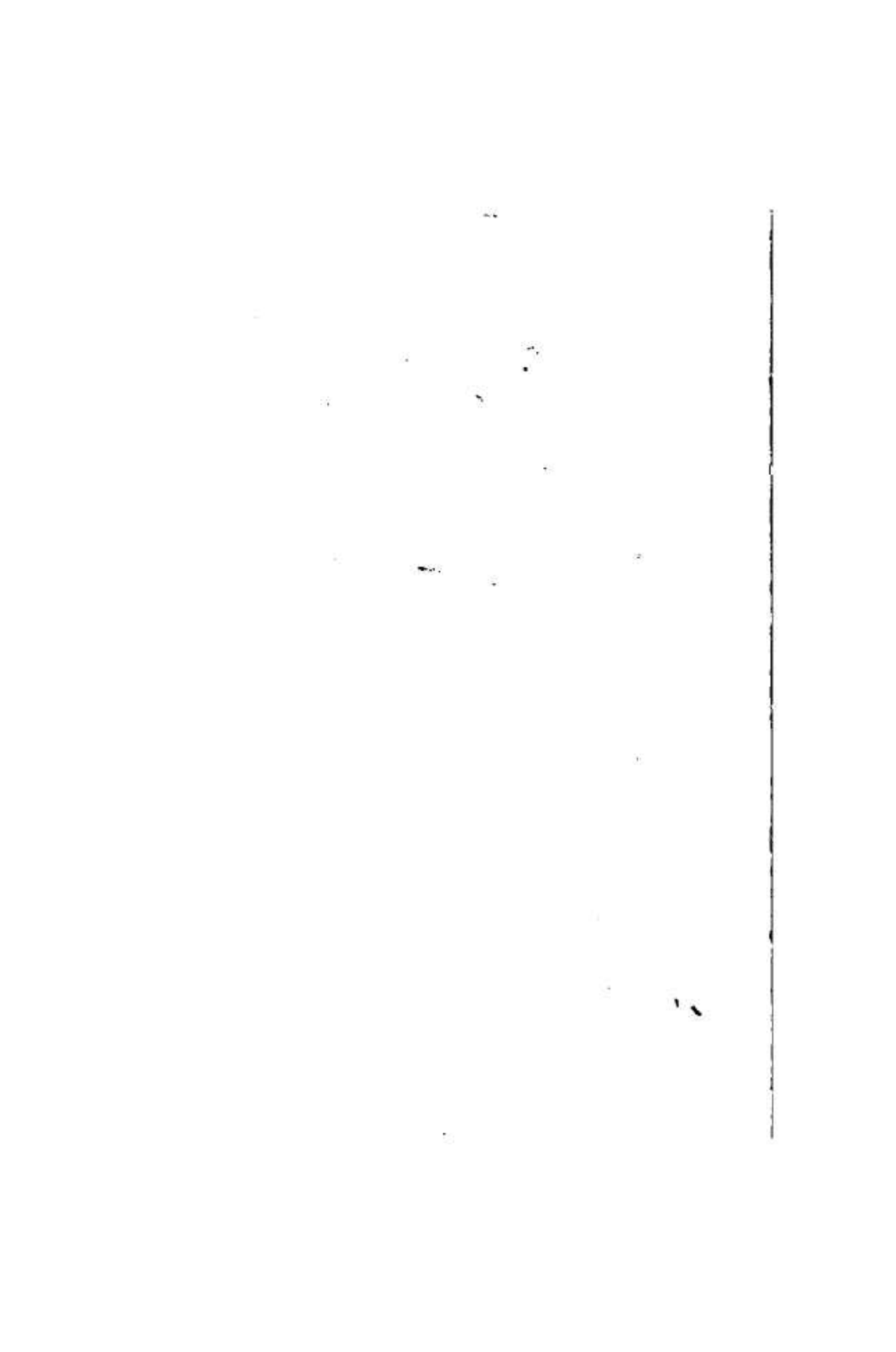
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# COMTE AND MILL

## CHAPTER I

### ANTECEDENTS

THE two thinkers who have been brought together as the subjects of this volume spring out of what is broadly the same movement of modern thought. If within it they are in some respects antithetic, this makes them all the better adapted for simultaneous treatment. Both, on the intellectual side, were adherents of the philosophy called in general experiential; and with both alike the whole effort of thought was inspired by a social aim. The difference is that by the younger of the two the experience regarded as the ground of knowledge was supposed to be explicable by impressions on the individual mind; whereas the elder had transcended 'individualism' in this sense, and conceived of knowledge as fundamentally a social product. For Mill, the individual human being is a component of society known prior to the composition. For Comte, he cannot be known as

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human except in relation to it, and can only be thought of apart from it by abstraction.

This change of view is often said to characterise the advance made by the nineteenth century on the eighteenth. Because Mill had not appreciated this advance, it is sometimes said that he ought to be classed as still belonging in spirit to the eighteenth century. Comte, in this resembling Hegel in spite of his very different general philosophy, was one of those who had most unquestionably made the new point of view their own. At first sight therefore he might appear to have all the advantage over his younger contemporary. This impression, however, would be wrong. The whole value of a philosopher's thought cannot be tested by any single point of view; and there were lines on which Mill, though not so systematic and powerful a thinker all round, went deeper and achieved more than Comte

There is not space to say much of the biography of either; but the leading facts must be given. Auguste Comte was born at Montpellier on the 19th January 1798, and died at Paris on the 5th September 1857. John Stuart Mill was born at Pentonville on the 20th May 1806, and died at Avignon on the 8th May 1873. Comte's system-

## ANTECEDENTS

atic training was in mathematical and physical science; first at the Lycée of Montpellier and afterwards at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris. In youth he also accumulated extensive knowledge of history and literature, and an extremely tenacious memory gave him ever afterwards full command of his material. Henceforth, however, he only elaborated and did not add to the store. His later abstinence from the reading of contemporary literature and journalism he described as 'cerebral hygiene.' The greater part of his life (1816 to 1851) was more or less absorbed by the private teaching of mathematics and by the duties of posts as public teacher and examiner. What he always regarded as his distinctive work had to be done in the intervals of obligatory tasks; till at length, having been deprived first of one post and then of another through the hostility of scientific specialists whom he had failed to conciliate either for his philosophy or for himself personally, he was supported, in further developing his doctrine, by the subsidies of disciples and sympathisers. In one respect Mill's external circumstances were similar. He too was never a teacher of philosophy, but had duties extrinsic to the purpose of his life as he had been led to conceive it from the first. A