

**PASSAGES FROM  
THE LETTERS OF  
AUGUSTE COMTE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649667932

Passages from the Letters of Auguste Comte by Auguste Comte & John K. Ingram

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**AUGUSTE COMTE & JOHN K. INGRAM**

**PASSAGES FROM  
THE LETTERS OF  
AUGUSTE COMTE**



---

*F. ...  
...*

PASSAGES

FROM

THE LETTERS OF AUGUSTE COMTE

YBI  
Comte

# PASSAGES

FROM THE

LETTERS OF AUGUSTE COMTE

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED

BY

JOHN K. INGRAM, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF

"OUTLINES OF THE HISTORY OF RELIGION"

LONDON

ADAM & CHARLES BLACK

1901

---

## PREFACE.

THE Letters of Auguste Comte from which the extracts in the present volume have been taken are contained, with the exception of those to Drs. Audiffrent and Allman, in the following books:—

*Lettres d' Auguste Comte à Richard Congreve.* 1889.

*Auguste Comte: Lettres à des Positivistes anglais.* 1889.

*Lettres d' Auguste Comte à Henry Edger et à M. John Metcalf.* 1889.

*Lettres d' Auguste Comte à Henry Dix Hutton.* 1890.

*Sept Lettres d' Auguste Comte à Antoine Étex.* 1895.

The Letters to Mrs. Austin have appeared in the *Revue Occidentale*. I am indebted to Dr. Audiffrent for those addressed to him, he having kindly communicated to me, some years since, a manuscript copy of them, of which I then made a transcript. Those to M. Sabatier are given in the appendix to Dr. Audiffrent's "Lettre à M. Miguel Lemos," 1887. Dr. Allman copied for me the letter to him from which I have printed a passage.

Blanchard & Berg 1944

In selecting the extracts for translation, the necessary limitation of my task has compelled me to omit with regret much that is, for various reasons, important. Many passages which do not appear in this volume are of great biographical and historical interest, as referring to incidents of Comte's career, or to his daily habits, or as exhibiting his relations with persons more or less remarkable as early friends or enemies of Positivism; many, too, contain valuable intellectual instruction and moral counsel. It would have been desirable, could I have undertaken the work, to translate in their entirety all the letters of Comte's later period, or, as he himself called it, his "second life." But, as this was not possible for me, I have sought to present to my readers such passages as seemed to express most clearly his final conceptions respecting the Religion of Humanity, or to contain the most striking and impressive precepts and suggestions for the guidance of conduct at all times and particularly now. His testamentary Executors are preparing for publication all his letters, so far as they are at present available,\* and doubtless, when this work appears, some of his English

---

\* See *Note* at the end of the present volume. The Letters to M. Valat and to J. S. Mill, which have already been published, will not be contained in the forthcoming collection.



disciples will produce a translation of the whole. In the meantime it is my hope that the present extracts will assist the public in forming a just appreciation of Comte's personal nature, and will contribute to the edification of serious minds.

All these extracts either bear on "doctrine" or convey "reproof, correction, or instruction in righteousness." The regulation of feeling, and, through it, of the whole life, was the object which Comte kept perpetually before him. J. S. Mill said of him that he was a "morality-intoxicated man," and there is a substantial truth under this not very happily chosen epithet. Moral excellence, by which Comte understood the habitual subordination of egoism to altruism, and the self-dedication of the individual to the service of Humanity, was the direct or ultimate aim of all his efforts, whether for his own discipline or for the guidance of others. For the full attainment of this end he regarded intellectual enlightenment as indispensable, and it was chiefly on that ground that he valued it so highly. He never, indeed, overlooked the importance of such knowledge as directs human action on the material world; but it was principally as being—when rightly constituted and co-ordinated—the handmaid of true Religion, that he held Science in esteem. "All the

Sciences," he says, in a passage in which he is not concerned with their industrial utility, "have value only as preparing the study of human nature; even this can be truly systematised only by connecting it with its practical destination for the improvement of man; everything else is vanity."\*

It is to be remembered that Comte filled two offices, connected but distinct; he was the Founder of the Religion of Humanity, and also the first High-priest of that Religion. His premature death deprived us of two treatises which he regarded as "a necessary complement" of his work in the former capacity: but, deeply as this loss, especially that of the treatise on *Morals*, is to be deplored, he considered the construction of the Positive Religion as essentially accomplished, and the treatises referred to would have been developments rather than fresh creations. Had he lived to publish these, and one or two projected minor writings, he would have devoted himself altogether for the remainder of his life to the sacerdotal work of governing the Church, preaching, advising on public questions, administering the Positive Sacraments, and directing individual souls. There is in his letters much to indicate how the task of spiritual direction

---

\* See Letter to G. Audiffrent of 29th January, 1857.

---

would have been discharged—how he would have laboured to develop the influences of Religion on the hearts and lives of his individual disciples, guiding their progress, correcting their errors, censuring their deviations, and awakening their sense of duty, in modes adapted to their respective natures and circumstances. This kind of action, indeed, he already exercised, and some examples of it will be found in the extracts I now publish, though I have sought rather to present such passages as contain instruction for the collective body of his followers, and throw light on his doctrine and policy as a whole. When his entire correspondence has been given to the world, the two offices of which I have spoken, and in particular the second, will be more fully understood.

All the present extracts are from the Letters of Comte's later period. He led two successive lives—one extending from the date of his early Essays (1819-28) to the completion of the *Positive Philosophy* in 1842; the other occupying the interval till his death in 1857. The work of his first life was the systematisation of Science and the construction of his Philosophy; in his second, he worked out the ultimate purpose of his previous labours by the foundation of his Religion. The dawn of his second