

**DONNE'S SERMONS;
SELECTED
PASSAGES**

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Donne's Sermons; Selected Passages by John Donne & Logan Pearsall Smith

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JOHN DONNE & LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH

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SERMONS

Selected Passages

WITH AN ESSAY

by

Logan Pearsall Smith



O X F O R D

At the Clarendon Press

M D C C C G X I X

NOTE

I REFER in my notes to the three folios of Donne's Sermons as I, II, and III respectively. I is the first folio, *LXXX Sermons*, 1640; II is *Fifty Sermons*, 1649; III is *XXVI Sermons*, 1660. The text of each passage is taken from the first appearance of the sermon which contains it in print, whether in the folios, or in the earlier published quartos of separate sermons printed in Donne's lifetime, or shortly after his death. The original punctuation has been preserved; and also the original spelling, except in the use of 'i' for 'j', of 'u' for 'v' and vice versa, and of contractions for 'm' or 'n'. I refer to Professor Grierson's edition of Donne's Poems (*The Poems of John Donne*, edited by Herbert J. C. Grierson, M.A., Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1912) as *Poems*; to *The Life and Letters of John Donne*, by Edmund Gosse (London, William Heinemann, 1899), as *Gosse*; to *John Donne*, by Augustus Jessopp, D.D. (Methuen and Co., 1897), as *Jessopp*. *Spearing* refers to Miss Spearing's 'A Chronological Arrangement of Donne's Sermons' (*Modern Languages Review*, vol. viii, 1913); *Coleridge*, to Coleridge's 'Notes on Donne', published in *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, collected and arranged by Henry Nelson Coleridge, 1838, vol. iii. *C. and T. Jas. I.*, and *C. and T. Charles I.*, refer

to *The Court and Times of James the First* (1848), and *The Court and Times of Charles the First* (1848). The references to Donne's *Devotions* are to the first edition of 1624. Ramsay refers to Miss Ramsay's *Les Doctrines médiévales chez Donne, le Poète métaphysicien de l'Angleterre* (Oxford University Press, 1917). I must express my special thanks to Mr. Edmund Gosse, C.B., for his kindness in lending me a number of very rare first editions of Donne's sermons from his collection of Donne's works.

INTRODUCTION

THE remarkable and somewhat enigmatic figure of John Donne is one that has attracted a good deal of attention in recent years ; his life has been studied, his poems and letters carefully edited, his character analysed, and his position as a poet acutely debated. His harshness, his crabbed and often frigid way of writing, his forced conceits, his cynicism and sensuality, are extremely repellent to some readers ; while to others his subtlety, his realism, and a certain modern and intimate quality in his poems, illuminated as they are with splendid flashes of imaginative fire, possess an extraordinary interest and fascination. There are people who hate Donne ; there are others who love him, but there are very few who have read his poems and remain quite indifferent to him. His character is still a puzzle, his reputation as a poet, eclipsed for a long time and only revived in our own day, is by no means yet the subject of final agreement.

In spite of this modern interest in Donne, and the study which has been devoted to his works, there is one aspect of them which, until recently, has received no very adequate attention. In addition to his poems, his letters, and a few minor prose pieces, Donne left behind him an immense body of theological writings. By birth and

by the tradition of his family a Roman Catholic, and for that reason shut out in his youth from the paths of secular ambition which had so great an attraction for him, he was of necessity much preoccupied with theological considerations; and it was not till after much study of controversial divinity that he succeeded in convincing himself of the truth of the Anglican position, which he finally made his own, and which, even in his secular days, he emphatically defended. When at the age of forty-two, after long experience of poverty and many worldly disappointments, he found all other paths of preferment closed to him, and at last, after much hesitation, took religious orders, he then began that career as a great divine and preacher which, until the revival of interest in his poetry, remained his principal claim to remembrance. But his fame as a preacher has been this long time fame at second hand; it is due to Izaak Walton's descriptions of his sermons, rather than to any reading of the sermons themselves. The very quantity, indeed, of his sermons—and no Anglican divine of the period has left behind him such a number—has discouraged students from thorough study of them; and, indeed, to read these great folio volumes is a task not lightly to be undertaken. But it is not only the mere bulk and body of these folios, the great number and length of Donne's sermons, which daunts the reader; there is much in the writing itself which renders it difficult and distasteful to the modern mind. In the first place sermons themselves, and especially old sermons, have fallen somewhat out of fashion; they are not often read now, and the collected and republished editions

of the great seventeenth century divines rest for the most part unopened on our shelves. People read novels, biographies, books of travel, social and political treatises instead of the sermons in which their grandfathers and grandmothers delighted: Hooker, Barrow, South, Tillotson are names indeed, but little more than names to most of us; and even so great a writer of English prose, so exquisite an artist as Jeremy Taylor, is familiar to us only in extracts and selected passages. For modern theologians this old divinity, with its obsolete learning and forgotten controversies, has little more than an archaeological interest; while to the more secular-minded, the old divines, whose severe brows and square faces meet our eyes when we open their great folios, seem, with their imposed dogmas, their heavy and obsolete methods of exposition and controversy, almost as if they belonged to some remote geological era of human thought. We are reminded of Taine's image of them as giant mastodons or megatheria, slowly winding their scaly backs through the primeval slime, and meeting each other, armed with syllogisms and bristling with texts, in theological battle, to tear the flesh from one another's flanks with their great talons, and cover their opponents with filth in their efforts to destroy them.

And yet these old divines were great men and great writers, their voices enthralled the best and wisest of their own generation, and it is a misfortune for their fame, and a misfortune for our literature, that they put their wisdom and observation and deep feeling, their great gifts of imagination, and their often exquisite mastery of the art of expression into the hortatory