

DANTE, AND ST. ANSELM

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Dante, and St. Anselm by Dean Church

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DEAN CHURCH

**DANTE, AND
ST. ANSELM**

The New Universal Library

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BY
DEAN CHURCH



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INTRODUCTION

DEAN CHURCH's essay on Dante was written in 1849, when the author was fresh from a recent tour in Italy and Greece, and first appeared, in January 1850, in the pages of *The Christian Remembrancer*, a short-lived quarterly review conducted with great ability and brilliancy, to which some eminent men connected with the famous Oxford Movement contributed. Its author was then not known beyond Oxford, where he was in the eventful times in the thirties and forties of the last century, when that University made such a deep and permanent effect on the religious and spiritual life of England, and where he came into intimate contact with men who have left their impress so indelibly on their times—Pusey, Keble, Hurrell-Proude, and especially with Newman, whose disciple he was, and whose subsequent secession to Rome he felt as deeply as a personal loss. The influence of Newman was great and lasting, and Church never ceased his regard for him till death took both of them away, within a few months of each other, in 1890. In his last book, published soon after his death, on the Oxford Movement, he has left a valuable record behind of his connection with these great men, and especially with Newman, of whom it contains a brilliant sketch, written in his best style.

The essay was reprinted, with some other of his early contributions to the press, by some of his Oxford friends in 1854, when he had left that University, where he was for fourteen years, from 1838 to 1852, Fellow of Oriel, when that College was at its best, being the centre of the Movement with which it is identified, to become the Rector of Whatley, a small parish in Somersetshire, where he was fully content to remain for nearly nineteen years in rural obscurity, till Gladstone dragged him out and forced upon

him the Deanery of St. Paul's in August 1871. But this was the only preferment he could be prevailed upon to accept. When Archbishop Tait died, in 1882, Gladstone was anxious to appoint him to the vacant See of Canterbury, and he had the refusal of it (*Life and Letters*, by his daughter, p. 307). But he preferred to remain where he was, nay, he even thought of retirement from that post also. This volume of 1854 was, curiously enough, called by the same name, *Essays and Reviews*, as the work which created so much commotion in the Church of England six years later, and earned an unenviable notoriety for a time. With the characteristic modesty and self-diffidence which clung to him throughout his career, the author wrote to a friend at the time that 'I should not have republished the essays myself'. But the Oxford friends judged better of his work, for by publishing the volume they not only showed their regard for the young author, but also made a permanent and valuable contribution to English literature.

The modest looking volume soon went out of print, and has always been prized by book-lovers. The author would not reprint it in his life time. A great part of it now makes its appearance again, after fifty-two years, in the present book. The essay on Dante, contained in it, was widely appreciated even on the Continent, and its excellence was acknowledged by the German scholar of Dante, Gœschel, in his article in Herzoy's famous *Real Encyclopadie* (Dean Plumptre, *Quarterly Review*, April 1869, p. 438). The Dean was prevailed upon to reprint it in 1878, when it appeared in the volume which contained the first English translation of Dante's *De Monarchia*, done by his talented son, who died prematurely in 1888.

The two essays on St Anselm, reprinted here for the first time from the volume of 1854, were afterwards expanded by the author into his monograph on that great mediæval character in 1870. But the

original essays possess a vigour and freshness of treatment which the later expansion somewhat lacks. When he was at work upon the later monograph the author himself felt this, and he thus wrote to his intimate friend of Oxford days, Canon Mozley: 'Doing Anselm a second time was rather tiresome work. The getting it up was almost as troublesome as the first time, without the zest of a new subject'. The same letter contains some noteworthy remarks about his hero. 'What you say is so true, not merely about the many sides of the character, so much beyond what was to be expected in his time and position, but about the kind of "elegance" that there is about him, with an unconsciousness of the idea of elegance at all. He almost answers to Matthew Arnold's requirements of "sweetness and light", in the free way in which he lets his thought return upon itself, and play about common subjects, and received words and formulas' (*Life and Letters*, p. 192).

These essays on Anselm first appeared in 1873 in *The British Critic*—a weekly paper of the type of the present *Guardian*, which Church helped to found a little later, in 1846, with friends like Mozley (1813—1878) and Rogers (afterwards Lord Blachford, 1811—1889)—and were the first attempts in literature of their author. He thus playfully writes of his subject to his mother while engaged on it in October 1842: 'I am hard at work on an article for *The British Critic* on the life of a certain Archbishop of Canterbury, named Anselm, who was a very great man in the eyes of people a long while ago, but he has been shelved a good while for having had the misfortune to be a monk and a papist. He lived in the days of a certain unspeakable scamp of a king called William Rufus, a sort of combination of Lords A, and B, and C, with a good spice of peculiar wickedness of his own to boot; and he and Anselm, as was natural, could not quite "hit it off together", or live on the best of terms. So accordingly, in my