

**THE CHURCH OF
THE FATHERS. [NEW
YORK-1900]**

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The Church of the Fathers. [New York-1900] by John Henry Newman

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JOHN HENRY NEWMAN

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The Church of the Fathers

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to the First and Second Editions

Reprinted in the Third and Fourth Editions
"with a few literary corrections"

THE following sketches, which, with two or three exceptions, have appeared in the *British Magazine* during 1833 and the following years, do not, as the author is very conscious, warrant a title of such high pretension as that which was there prefixed to them and is here preserved. But that title will at least show the object with which they were written; viz. to illustrate, as far as they go, the tone and modes of thought, the habits and manners of the early times of the Church.

The author is aware how much a work is open to imperfection, and therefore to criticism, which is made up in so great measure of minute historical details and of translations; nor would he subject himself either to the one or the other did he not think that the chance of bringing out or recommending one or two of the characteristics of primitive Christianity was worth the risk of mistakes which, after all, would but affect himself and not his readers.

As to the translations, he is very sensible what constant and unflagging attention is requisite to catch the sense of the original, and what discrimination in the

choice of English to do justice to it. And further, over and above actual faults, variety of tastes and fluctuation of moods among readers, make it impossible so to translate as to please every one; and if a translator be conscious to himself, as he may well be, of viewing either his original or version differently, according to the time or feeling with which he takes it up, much more will he resign himself to such differences of judgment in the case of other minds. It should be considered, too, that translation in itself is, after all, but a problem—how, two languages being given, the nearest approximation may be made in the second to the expression of ideas already conveyed through the medium of the first. The problem almost starts with the assumption that something must be sacrificed, and the chief question is, What is the least sacrifice? In a balance of difficulties one translator will aim at being critically correct, and will become obscure, cumbrous, and foreign; another will aim at being English, and will appear deficient in scholarship. While grammatical particles are followed out the spirit evaporates; and, while ease is secured, new ideas are intruded, or the point of the original is lost, or the drift of the context broken.

Under these circumstances perhaps it is fair to lay down that, while every care must be taken against the introduction of new or the omission of existing ideas in the original text, yet in a book intended for general reading faithfulness may be considered simply to consist in expressing in English the *sense* of the original, the actual words of the latter being viewed mainly as *directions into* its meaning, and scholarship being necessary in order to gain the full insight which they afford; and next that, where something must be sacrificed, precision or intelligibility, it is better in a popular work to be

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understood by those who are not critics than to be applauded by those who are.

In the present translations this principle has been taken to justify the omission of passages, and now and then the condensation of sentences, when the extract otherwise would have been too long, a studious endeavour being all along made to preserve the sense from injury.

February 21st, 1840.

Advertisement to the Third Edition

1857

THE volume here presented to the reader contains some of the earliest compositions of what is called the Oxford, or Tractarian, School. They are portions of a series which appeared in the *British Magazine* of 1833 and the following years, and they are here reprinted from the Edition of 1842 with such trivial alterations as were rendered necessary by the circumstances under which they were written.

No alterations, however, many or few, can obliterate the polemical character of a work directed originally against Protestant ideas. And this consideration must plead for certain peculiarities which it exhibits, such as its freedom in dealing with saintly persons, the gratuitous character of some of its assertions, and the liberality of many of its concessions. It must be recollected that, in controversy, a writer grants all that he can afford to grant, and avails himself of all that he can get granted: in other words, if he seems to admit, it is mainly "for argument's sake"; and if he seems to assert, it is mainly as an "*argumentum ad hominem*." As to positive statements of his own, he commits himself to as few as he can, just as a soldier in campaign takes no more baggage than is enough, and considers the conveniences of home life as only *impedimenta* in his march.

This being kept in view, it follows that, if the author of this volume allows the appearance of infirmity or

error in St. Basil or St. Gregory or St. Martin, he allows it because he can afford to say "*transeat*" to allegations which, even though they were ever so well founded, would not at all interfere with the heroic sanctity of their lives or the doctrinal authority of their words. And if he can bear to hear St. Anthony called an enthusiast without protesting, it is because that hypothesis does not even tend to destroy the force of the argument against the religion of Protestants, which is suggested by the contrast existing between their spirit and his.

Nor is this the sole consideration on which an author may be justified in the use of frankness, after the manner of Scripture, in speaking of the saints; for their lingering imperfections surely make us love them more, without leading us to reverence them less, and act as a relief to the discouragement and despondency which may come over those who, in the midst of much error and sin, are striving to imitate them, according to the saying of St. Gregory on a graver occasion, "*Plus nobis Thomae infidelitas ad fidem, quam fides credentium discipulorum profuit.*"

And in like manner, the dissatisfaction of Saints, of St. Basil, or again of St. Thomas, with the contemporary policy or conduct of the Holy See, while it is no justification of ordinary men, bishops, clergy, or laity, in feeling the same, is no reflection either on those Saints or on the Vicar of Christ. Nor is his infallibility in dogmatic decisions compromised by any personal and temporary error into which he may have fallen, in his estimate, whether of a heretic, such as Pelagius, or of a Doctor of the Church, such as Basil. Accidents of this nature are unavoidable in the state of being which we are allotted here below.