

**LACORDAIRE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649286010

Lacordaire by Eugene de Mirecourt

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Cover @ 2017

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**EUGENE DE MIRECOURT**

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From a miniature by Mme. Delliens

*Frontispiece*

# LACORDAIRE

BY COUNT D'HAUSSONVILLE  
OF THE FRENCH ACADEMY  
TRANSLATED BY A. W. EVANS

UNIV. OF  
CALIFORNIA

LONDON  
HERBERT & DANIEL  
95 NEW BOND STREET, W.  
1913

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## PREFACE

PULPIT eloquence seems, in the history of literature, to be a peculiarly French gift. When we seek the finest models of the eloquence of the bar or of the tribune, it is to antiquity that we go, and no name has overshadowed those of Demosthenes and of Cicero. The England of the last two centuries has given us examples of Parliamentary eloquence that can be compared with those which France has produced during the same epoch, and the speeches of Burke, of Fox, of Brougham, do not yield to those of Mirabeau, of de Serre, or of Berryer. But it is not the same with her preachers, whose inferiority Taine points out in his "History of English Literature," and for pulpit eloquence no country is comparable with the land of Bossuet, of Bourdaloue, and of Massillon. If among the Fathers of the Church we meet with some who can be placed by their side,—a Saint John Chrysostom, a Saint Gregory of Nazianzus,—on the other hand, they are without rivals in the literature of modern peoples, and of this form of human thought it is assuredly the French language that offers the finest specimens.

The ancients, with whose lives eloquence was so constantly mingled, said that the great orator has in him something divine—"aliquid divinum." Is not this especially true when he who has received the gift of expressing his thought by speech puts



this gift in the service, not of some human and passing cause, but of that which is eternal and Divine? In truth, he is at once a man of action and a man of thought, for at one stroke he agitates crowds and ideas. While he is labouring for the salvation of souls, he is raising a monument which calls forth the admiration of men of letters, and if "the good" is his object, "the beautiful" is his instrument. Thus, one can say that, of the different forms of human genius, sacred eloquence is that which gives most complete employment to human faculties, for it supposes in the same man the co-operation of an apostle and of an artist both of whom work in God.

With this French gift, with this Divine gift, no one has been more richly endowed than Jean Baptiste Henri Lacordaire, with the exception, however, of Bossuet. But while Bossuet was a universal genius, superior in everything and by everything,—in eloquence, in controversy, in history,—Lacordaire was only an orator; perhaps, I dare to say, more of an orator than Bossuet, at least in this respect, that he had in a higher degree "the tones that move, the voice that vibrates and charms, and the gesture which completes speech." Thus one can say of him that he is the type of the preacher, and in this capacity his place was marked out in advance in a series which would gather together all the literary glories of France.

But is it solely the preacher in Lacordaire that can interest us? Is it not as much and more the man himself, as he appeared living and throbbing behind the brilliant veil of his oratory, or showing himself with open heart in the intimacy of his correspondence? We shall hear all the echoes of

that age, "everything in which he had loved," resounding in the depths of that sonorous soul. From this priest, from this monk, none of our passions or of our sufferings remained alien; for those with which his experience did not make him acquainted, his intelligence enabled him to divine. Finally, he was one of the precursors and authors of that Catholic renaissance of which our contemporaries to-day are the surprised witnesses, and, among the questions that engage and divide us, one will not find perhaps a single one that has not been debated or anticipated by him. Thus, in studying his epoch and his life, it will be in certain respects our own epoch that we shall believe we see passing in advance before our eyes, and our own life that we shall have the illusion of living again. We shall perceive there, as in a magic mirror, the reflection of our own trials, and the presage of our own restless destinies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> There exist two very complete and very interesting biographies of Father Lacordaire. One of them is due to Father Chocarne, who was one of his brothers in Saint Dominic, the other to M. Foisset, his oldest and closest friend. M. de Montalembert has also devoted to him some admirable pages under the title of "A Nineteenth-Century Monk." I am naturally much indebted to these three works, but also to Father Lacordaire's correspondence, which was almost entirely unpublished at the time they appeared, and which to-day comprises no fewer than eight volumes. I have also had access to a certain number of unpublished letters, and I thank those who have been good enough to entrust me with them.

