

**AN ESSAY ON THE  
MIRACLES RECORDED IN THE  
ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY  
OF THE EARLY AGES**

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An Essay on the Miracles Recorded in the Ecclesiastical History of the Early Ages by John Henry Newman

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ESSAY ON THE MIRACLES

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BY

JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, B.D.,

FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE.

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THIS Essay has appeared as an introduction to a portion of Fleury's Ecclesiastical History, and is now detached from it, in consequence of a general wish that it should be sold separately.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE publication of a portion of Fleury's elaborate work in English has been undertaken in consequence of the growing interest which is felt at this time in the history of the Church, and the want of works in our language which may be considered to satisfy it. The learned Mosheim, who is most familiarly known to the English reader, has not, properly speaking, written a history; unless, indeed, that deserves the name, which contains no action, pursues no line of narrative, discovers no curiosity about individual character and its influence upon the course of events, and throws no light upon the philosophy of doctrine and its developments. We are presented with a vast multitude of isolated facts in their external aspect; without any relief of the oppression they create from ethical tone, eloquence of style, or skill in composition, on the part of the narrator. His work, therefore, is rather fitted for reference than for reading. A similar judgment has been pronounced by one, whose memory is very dear to the writer of these lines. "Let any one take up "Mosheim," says Mr. Rose in his Second Divinity Lecture delivered at Durham, "—and I mention his name without "any disrespect, for he has done whatever could be done in "his way, by actually wedging and driving in one fact after "another into his pages till they bristle with facts, and the "heart and the imagination are alike beaten down and "crushed to pieces—and see, when one has read his careful "and laborious conglomeration of facts, what more we know

“ of Christianity, as a rule of life intended to influence both  
“ individuals and nations, gradually to operate upon laws and  
“ customs, and institutions and manners, and gradually to  
“ cheer and bless all the sons of men.

“ We toil through his pages with a reluctant and weary  
“ spirit, without ever going beneath the surface, or beyond  
“ dry details, without one movement of the heart for the cause  
“ which he is recording, and with lively pleasure only when  
“ we can lay the book out of our hands.

“ In a word, in Mosheim there is no love of the cause, or,  
“ if the man had a heart, the writer thought it his duty to  
“ overlay his feelings with dry details of barren facts, without  
“ the record of a single moral lesson to which they can lead,  
“ or a feeling which they can inspire.”

Nor is a work like Milner's better calculated to supply the deficiency; for though he writes in a tone of piety and seriousness, and with an evident desire to do justice to the great Saints of Christendom, and to illustrate the power of Christian principles in their lives and writings, he falls into the opposite extreme, and has adopted a style between Meditations and Biography. His learning, moreover, is very inadequate to his undertaking; and he is driven to introduce his private religious views into his narrative as a sort of compensation for this disadvantage; judging of persons, not by their actual circumstances and opinions, but by his own view of Scripture teaching, and thinking to ascertain, estimate, and dispose of historical facts, not by research into the existing sources of information, but by the theory of Calvinism. Yet, in consideration of the love he bore to the Fathers in an age when few voices were raised even in apology for them, he is ever to be mentioned with kindness and honour.

Neander's historical works are written, as even a slight acquaintance with them will suffice to shew, with an abundance of learning and thought, and great gratitude is due to the



persons who have taken upon themselves the laborious task of translating portions of them for the benefit of those who are not German scholars ; but his History of the Three First Centuries is so full of theories, and those characteristic of his country, and facts are stated with so little attention to historical order and connection, that, valuable or rather necessary as his work is to the theological student, he does not come up to the demand of the present times, when men want to be put into possession of the plain state of things, as it existed in ancient times, with the liberty of judging of them for themselves. The Life of St. Chrysostom, however, translated by Mr. Stapleton, is written on a different plan, and, as being a simple account of his teaching and conduct, with copious extracts from his writings, certainly does answer, as regards the biography of that eminent Father, the purpose which Fleury will be found to fulfil on the whole as regards the History of the Church.

What we meet with in Fleury's work is a minute and exact narrative of the course of ecclesiastical events, as they occurred ; and this, from the plan of their histories, is not found in Mosheim, Milner, Gibbon, Neander, Milman, or Dollinger, great as are the merits of these authors in various ways. And another excellence thence resulting, which has already been hinted at, is this : that his particular religious opinions exert a far less influence upon his relation of facts than those of the abovenamed authors, one of whom was not even a believer in Christianity, and all of whom put forward a theory, or write as apologists or controversialists. Of course it is not denied that Fleury writes as a Roman Catholic, nor is it intended to place his creed on a level with that of Calvin or with Protestantism or Rationalism generally ; and it is undoubtedly an advantage in itself, where there is but a choice of evils, to select an author who belongs to the Church Catholic in preference to others who do not belong to it, or who deny its existence ; yet it is a still greater advantage, when

the circumstances of our theological literature oblige us to look abroad for instructors in history, to find one who does not prominently put forward the characteristics of his Church, but mainly contents himself with setting before the reader facts, opinions, characters, and writings, as he finds them, without comment of his own. It may be added, that since Fleury is of the Gallican school, where he does introduce his own views, it is commonly in reduction of those characteristics of his communion, which are viewed among ourselves as exaggerations or perversions of Christian truth.

The faults, on the other hand, which are incident to a history such as Fleury's, are obvious, and some of them not inconsiderable. A bare relation of facts without system or philosophical view, however ethical, personal, and, as it were, living they may be in their character, is apt to become tedious and wearisome. And to many minds it is a source of much painful perplexity, to have a variety of deeds, sentiments, measures, and persons, set before them, without any clue to guide them how far each of these is true, and how far faulty, where they are at liberty to praise and where they are bound to blame. A still more obvious fault is the prolixity which is the necessary attendant on such a history. This is so serious a consideration in the present publication, that it is a question whether, in any subsequent portions to which it may proceed, some attempt might not advantageously be made at abridgment.

The portion contained in the present Volume commences with the Second Ecumenical Council, held at Constantinople, A. D. 381; and has been selected under the idea that it is a part of history less known to theological students than the times which precede it. The matters treated in the Council in question, which was convened on the accession of Theodosius to settle the disturbances to which Arianism had given rise, are carried into two subsequent Councils held at Con-

stantinople, and two contemporaneous Councils at Aquileia and Rome. At this time the two most eminent Fathers in the East and West, were St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Ambrose; the latter of whom was the leading Bishop at Aquileia, and the former presided at Constantinople after the death of St. Meletius. St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Amphilochius of Iconium, and St. Cyril of Jerusalem were also present at Constantinople; in the West St. Martin was at the same date nearly in the middle of his Episcopate, and about sixty-five years old. St. Jerome was about forty, and at this time secretary to Pope Damasus. St. Paulinus was still in the world, filling the high offices of state. St. Chrysostom was a few years past thirty, and at Antioch in his Diaconate; St. Augustine still a Manichee, teaching rhetoric at Carthage, but soon about to pass into Italy and to be converted by St. Ambrose. These Fathers form the principal subject of the following books; especially St. Ambrose, whose Episcopate is contained in them nearly entire down to his death. Other chief subjects which occur are the history of St. Martin and the Ithacians, the sedition at Antioch, the conversion of St. Augustine, and his elevation to the See of Hippo, that of St. Chrysostom to the See of Constantinople, the destruction of the heathen temples in Egypt, and some considerable passages in the History of the Monastic Life, as seen in St. Paula and other ladies at Rome, in St. Jerome her spiritual guide, in St. Martin in Gaul, in the Monks in the Mountains near Antioch, and in those of Egypt.

It only remains to be observed in addition, that Herbert's translation (London, 1728) has been followed; but with so careful a revision, that as far as trouble is concerned, it may almost be said to be a new one; though the style retains marks of a former century. It has been carefully compared throughout with the original; and Fleury's marginal references have been all verified; where he does not mention