

**THE ALTAR; OR,  
MEDITATIONS IN  
VERSE ON THE GREAT  
CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE**

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The Altar; Or, Meditations in Verse on the Great Christian Sacrifice by Isaac Williams

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**ISAAC WILLIAMS**

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THE ALTAR.

THE ALTAR;

OR,

MEDITATIONS IN VERSE

ON

The Great Christian Sacrifice.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "THE CATHEDRAL," ETC.

*John H. ...*

" Quid enim sunt aliter corporalia Sacramenta, nisi quaedam quasi verba visibilia ?"  
S. AUGUSTIN.

LONDON:  
JOSEPH MASTERS, ALDERSGATE STREET,  
AND 76, NEW BOND STREET.

MDCCKLIX.

## ADVERTISEMENT.

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It was an ancient custom with devotional writers of the Roman Catholic Church, to connect meditations and prayers on the circumstances of our LORD'S Passion with the various parts of the Eucharistic Service; and this they did by a continued adaptation of the two carried on throughout the whole. It was a foreign book, formed on this system, which first drew the Writer's attention to the subject, wherein the entire series of thirty-four points, into which this adaptation is usually divided, was drawn out in a succession of as many pictures. Each of these thirty-four pictures was, moreover, accompanied with another in connection with it on the adjoining page; so that each of the thirty-four was in a manner twofold. In the former part, or the left-hand page, the scenes of our LORD'S Passion, Death, and Resurrection, by a very beautiful

embody the living language and speaking effect of the accompanying pictures and emblems:—

*“Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures,  
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.”*

The Writer perceived that there was no reason why the whole of this system might not be applied with equal propriety and fitness of adaptation to our own Communion Service: such suggestions or associations were in themselves devotional and edifying; while at the same time, by a similar appropriation in our own Church, it might be rendered quite innocent, and free from any taint of idolatry or superstition; while, moreover, by introducing no Saints but those which we receive in common with ancient Christendom, it seemed to unite us in one beautiful and edifying Service with “the Communion of Saints;” growing together into one Body as partaking of that One Bread, bound together in mystical union and fellowship, and “holding the Head, from which all the Body having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.” (Col. ii. 19.)

The whole series, indeed, and scheme of adaptation, is nothing more than the drawing out into separate and distinct points the very words of our LORD’s solemn institution, “Do this in remembrance of Me;” that “thankful remembrance of His death,” which our Church speaks of as the duty



of every devout communicant. And when can a course of meditations, at all times edifying, be so suitable as at the celebration of those "holy mysteries," wherein GOD "vouchsafes to feed us with the spiritual food of the most precious Body and Blood of His SON, our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST; and doth assure us thereby of His favour and goodness towards us, and that we are very members incorporate in the mystical Body of His SON, Which is the blessed company of all faithful people." In the words of Thomas à Kempis, "So great, so new, ought it to seem unto thee, when thou celebratest or partakest in these Holy Mysteries, as if on this same day CHRIST hanging on the Cross did suffer and die for the salvation of mankind." Or still more particularly in a writer of our own Church, the "Guide for the Penitent," ascribed to Bishop Taylor,—“During the celebration of this holy Sacrament, attend earnestly to what is done by the Priest. When he breaks the Bread, imagine to yourself that you see the Body of your dear SAVIOUR torn and crucified; and when he pours out the Wine, consider that His Blood was thus poured out upon the altar of the Cross.”

Reflection, which feeds on sight, will clothe itself with words; and the beauty of any conception which powerfully affects the feelings, naturally seeks for vent in expression. The Writer was thus led to draw out such meditations as arose from the

contemplation of each of these pictures in a series of sonnets; the break and variety which each picture supplied affording sufficient diversity for the returns of the same measure, continued in nearly two hundred poems. Thus picture and poetry became combined, which gave a new character to the undertaking.

In the first publication of this Work, great disappointment arose, not only from the imperfection of the drawings, but more so from the manner in which they were taken off, by one who was quite unequal to the task; so that at last it was thought advisable to suppress the whole Edition, with the exception of a few copies. Since that time, attempts have been made to reproduce the illustrations of the Work, but none of them have been considered equal to the purpose. The Writer himself would have been well content to sacrifice artistic skill for correct devotional taste and feeling; indeed everything must be inadequate to clothe conceptions which are themselves far above the reach of art. But although the rude emblems and uncouth symbols found on the early tombs in the catacombs speak a language more sublime and impressive than the finest works of a Raphael, or Fra Angelico, yet it was the privilege of the age of martyrs to be thus in their poverty exceeding rich; the same ideas must be conveyed in far other form and expression, to be admissible in the present refined age.

In the meantime the Writer has been requested to publish the Poems in a separate form, which he now does, with nothing more than the mention of each of the thirty-four points under which it was previously arranged with the accompanying prayers. Pictorial illustrations are, of course, great assistances towards devotional feeling and thought, yet, perhaps, for that very reason, such effect is not so deeply and permanently beneficial, as where the latent moral powers are called into action with less external impulse. Further it may be added, that if the subject is here introduced in a less attractive form, as apart from that, as it were, scenic representation, or lively realization to the senses which pictures afford, this may be in itself more suited to the chastened sobriety of our own Church; at all events, more agreeable to her condition at present, and may be considered to correspond with sacred services in which the accompanying music or chant ceases. "I became dumb, and opened not my mouth; for it was Thy doing."