

**GREAT FRENCH SERMONS  
FROM  
BOSSUET, BOURDALOUE  
AND MASSILLON**

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Great French Sermons from Bossuet, Bourdaloue and Massillon by Rev. D. O'Mahony & Rev. Fernand Cabrol

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**REV. D. O'MAHONY & REV. FERNAND CABROL**

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FROM BOSSUET, BOURDALOUE,  
AND MASSILLON

EDITED BY  
REV. D. O'MAHONY, B.D., B.C.L.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY THE  
RIGHT REV. DOM FERNAND CABROL, O.S.B.  
ABBOT OF FARNBOROUGH

"Christianity would not have enemies if it were not an enemy to their vices."—MASSILLON.

"The doctrine of the Gospels is the only one that touches the heart. A single word of the Gospel has more power over our souls than all the vehemence and all the inventions of profane eloquence."—BOSSUET



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## PREFACE

THESE translations of sermons of the famous French preachers of the seventeenth century appeared during the past two years in the *Southampton Catholic Magazine*. It is thought that their merit warrants their being offered to a wider public. The sermon on Mary Magdalen and those on Impurity and on the Thought of Death are adapted from old translations now out of print: all the others were translated specially for the *Southampton Magazine*.

The great length of the sermons in the original French has, in most cases, necessitated some condensation in the English version. We have omitted the ingenious compliments addressed to the royal personages before whom some of the sermons were delivered. The lengthy exordiums of some of Bossuet's sermons are curtailed. Two of the sermons from Massillon are considerably abridged; and of Bourdaloue's sermon on Death only a fragment is reproduced.

The special excellence of Bossuet's and Bourdaloue's discourses on the Passion has induced us to give several of their many sermons for Good Friday. Three of Bossuet's sermons on Our Lady are included. These are calculated to render intelligible what to many non-Catholics seems to be extravagance in the language of Catholic popular devotions to Mary; even the French infidel, Ernest Renan, was amongst those who have paid tribute to the beauty, the vigour, and the

originality of Bossuet's sermons on the Compassion of the Blessed Virgin. In teaching that Mary died of love, Bossuet adopted the view that prevails since the Middle Ages.

The reader that has to be content with a translation for his acquaintance with the sermons of the Great French preachers will, we venture to hope, regard it as a merit that chiefly fidelity to the original is aimed at in the translations that make up this volume.

D. O'M.

ST. EDMUND'S, SOUTHAMPTON.



## BOSSUET (1627-1704).

"Bossuet had a voice which spoke in the name of God and as the medium of Divine persuasion to the soul, and with a force and authority of language unequalled upon earth."—LAMARTINE.

"Bossuet is the most powerful, the most truly eloquent speaker and writer that our language has ever known."—SAINTE-BEUVE.

"Universal justice is rendered to the energy and precision of Bossuet's language; we admire in him the historian and the controversialist; and homage is paid to the orator, who was more abundant than Cicero and more vigorous than Demosthenes."—FERDINAND BRUNETIÈRE.

"Bossuet is one of the greatest thinkers, one of the greatest men of affairs, and the greatest orator France has produced."—EMILE FAGUET.

"Duly to estimate Bossuet it is needful always to see, behind the genius of the man, the soul of the priest which excites and contains that genius."—M. ALFRED RÉBELLIAU.

"Bossuet is one of the very few preachers whose sermons are frequently reprinted and are read by those who seek pleasure as well as by those who seek edification. And, if we in England have no name to place by Bossuet's, the same thing is ever increasingly true of his own country. His greatness is more and more seen to be far more than his rivals', of that order of bronze or marble which resists, conquers, and survives the centuries."—*The Times Literary Supplement*.

"Not only is Bossuet the greatest orator that ever occupied the pulpit in France, but he is also, perhaps, the writer who has had the most delicate appreciation of the French language."—M. RENÉ DOUMIC, in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*.

## BOURDALOUE (1632-1704).

"Bourdaloue seems actually to take away my breath when I listen to him, with such almost painful concentration of every sense does one hang upon his words. So marvellous is the power, the truth, the enthralling interest of his discourses, that I am spell-bound while he speaks, and really only draw my breath freely again when it pleases the great preacher to bring his sermon to an end."—MME. DE SÉVIGNÉ.

"Father Bourdaloue is the greatest orator of whom the pulpit has to boast. His sermons have long been my constant and greatest delight."—BOILEAU.

"Bourdaloue seeks rather to convince than to persuade, and the idea of pleasing his hearers never for a moment enters his mind. He was the first model of good preachers in Europe."—VOLTAIRE.

"The best sermons I ever read were preached by a Jesuit, Louis Bourdaloue."—BISHOP W. WARBURTON.

" Bourdaloue displays a fertility of resources, an exuberance of topics, whether for observation or ornament, not equalled by almost any other orator, sacred or profane."—LORD BROUGHAM.

" To Bourdaloue more truly than to any other is applicable the old definition of an orator, which he so often repeated to his pupils of rhetoric : *vir bonus dicendi peritus*."—A. FRUGÈRE.

" In the abstract analysis of the vices, the passions, the manifold infirmities of our nature, Bourdaloue is matchless, more penetrating and more original than La Bruyère."—M. GUSTAVE LANSON.

" The late Canon H. P. Lidón had studied the great school of French oratory, admiring especially Bourdaloue, and of later preachers the influence of Lacordaire is distinctly discernible. To their example he owed the completeness with which he arranged the framework of his sermons as well as much of the manner and method of his appeals."—CANON H. SCOTT-HOLLAND in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

### MASSILLON (1663-1742).

" I have heard many great preachers, and I have been contented with them ; but whenever I hear Father Massillon, I go away discontented with myself."—LOUIS XIV.

" Massillon has usually, and justly, been considered the greatest preacher, in the strict sense of the word, of France."—PROFESSOR G. SAINTSBURY.

" Of Bossuet, Bourdaloue, and Massillon, the first was the most majestic ; the second the most logical and intellectually compelling ; the third the greatest searcher of hearts, the most like Chrysostom, and, taken all in all, the greatest of the three."—REV. PROFESSOR P. A. BEECHER.

" No other orator than Massillon has ever contrived to say so little while employing such a multitude of words ; or, on the other hand, to say that little in more harmonious language. No other orator has known better how to turn rhetoric to account." F. BRUNETIÈRE.

" The eighteenth century placed Massillon, as a preacher, easily above Bossuet and Bourdaloue. Our age places him rather lower. He has neither the sublimity of Bossuet nor the logic of Bourdaloue. He excelled in depicting the passions, and in speaking to the heart in a language it always understood."—*The Catholic Encyclopædia*.

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