

**EXPOSITION OF THE SERMON ON
THE MOUNT, DRAWN FROM THE
WRITINGS OF ST. AUGUSTINE,
WITH OBSERVATIONS**

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Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount, drawn from the writings of St. Augustine, with observations by Richard Chenevix Trench

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RICHARD CHENEVIX TRENCH

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WITH
OBSERVATIONS,
BY
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PREFACE.

THIS little volume is not, as a glance at any page will show, a translation of St. Augustine's Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount,¹ but an attempt to draw from the circle of his writings, (that one of course included,) what of most important he has contributed for the elucidation, or the turning to practical uses, of this portion of Holy Scripture.

Yet I am conscious, from the very plan upon which the book is written, that it may be open to a charge, at least from an unfriendly critic, of something like presumption. It may be said that there is in it a continual passing of judgment,—an allowing and a disallowing,—a selecting and a putting aside,—an approving and condemning; and this in regard of one whom the Church has ever recognized among the very chiefest of her teachers. A friend, to whom the manuscript, when nearly prepared for press, was shown,—and whose counsel and judgment that I am able at all

¹ In the Benedictine Edition, tom. iii. pars 2^a, pp. 162—236.

times to profit by, is one of the chief happinesses of my life,—has warned me that it will hardly escape a charge of the kind. Yet I have not therefore been persuaded to alter my scheme, as indeed I could not have altered it, without renouncing the work altogether. For the plan which is now finding favour among us, of presenting in the mass, unsifted and untried, the old expositions of Scripture, often placing side by side explanations which, in their minor details at least, exclude one another, and this with no attempt to judge or discriminate between them,—no endeavour to separate the accident of one age, the superfluous, it may be the injurious, excrescence from the eternal truth, which is of all and for all ages,—seems to me profitable for little, and not likely to lead us into any deeper, or clearer and more intelligent knowledge of Scripture. Moreover, when we confine ourselves merely to the giving back the old, and this with well nigh a suspension of all judgment about it, what is this but saying, that the productive powers of the Church have ceased; that her power of educing from God's Word, by that Spirit which is ever with her, the truth in those forms in which it will best meet our present needs, exist no longer; that henceforth the Scripture shall be for us a cistern, clear it may be, and full, but no longer a

spring of water springing up as freshly and newly for our lips, as for the lips of any generation which has gone before :—and as her productive, so also that her discriminative power is gone ; she may no longer discern that which is akin to, and will assimilate with, her true life, and claim that and that only for her own ?

Neither seems there any genuine humility in forgoing or denying our advantages ;—they may be slight ones compared with those which other ages enjoyed for entering into the meaning of God's Word ; but, if slight, therefore to be husbanded the more. And, not to speak of the accumulation of merely critical and external helps, some such we plainly have. To deny this were to deny to the Church,—to her who, according to her truest idea, is ever teacher and ever taught,—that she has been learning any thing in the eighteen hundred years of her troubled warfare with the evil within her and the evil without. Yet some things surely she has found out ; some practices which promised well, which she anticipated would further piety, her own life and history have taught her do inevitably sooner or later run to seed, and hinder that holiness which they were meant to set forward ; that, tolerably safe in the hands of the earnest few, they are most unsafe when they descend, as by inevitable progress they must descend,

to the more careless many. Some language which for a while she held, or did not at least absolutely exclude, she has now discovered not to be the most adequate expression of the doctrines which she has always held, and therefore she will use no longer, and will disclaim, though she find it used by the most honoured of her teachers, even as she is sure they would disclaim it now. Before the false teaching of Eutyches had compelled her clearly to represent to herself the relation of the two natures in Christ, it impeached no man's orthodoxy, though he spoke of our blessed Lord as *God mingled with man*; but who, that meant right, would have used this language after? Before the order of our justification had been brought out with that distinctness, in which a doctrine only can be brought out through an earnest contending for it against some that would obscure or deny it, men might put the first last, and speak of sins "expiated with alms," or "washed out with tears." We there recognize a loss, while all lack of distinctness is such, but not a denial upon their parts who used this language *then*, that "we are justified by faith only." It were another thing to seek to revive and return to that language now.

The consciousness, moreover, that we, too, in our age, have our errors,—most of them, like some inner vest, worn so close, as to be invisible even

to ourselves,—that we, too, have our mistaken tendencies, our superstitions, our faulty statements of the truth, which we are handing down to the Church of a later age, slowly to discern, painfully to get rid of,—this, while it may well hinder that boastful self-exalting spirit, which is more fatal than any thing beside to a profiting by the past, yet must not hinder from a respectful using, even as regards our great forefathers in the faith themselves, whatsoever since their time the Church has won. Such a freedom they used with one another, such they demanded should be used in regard of themselves;¹ and such we must use in regard of them, if we would obtain from their writings the large blessing which they are capable of yielding; if these are to help to lead us into liberty, and not into bondage; if they are to be indeed our riches, and not, under that name, truly our poverty.

For myself, in regard of this little volume, which is in every way so slight, that it is hardly worth making an apology about it, and yet which I would not willingly leave exposed to this charge

¹ I will quote Augustine's own words on this very subject. He says, (Ep. 148, c. 4,) *Neque enim quorolibet disputationes, quamvis Catholicorum et laudatorum hominum, velut Scripturas canonicas habere debemus, ut nobis non liceat salvâ honorificentia quæ illis debetur hominibus, aliquid in eorum scriptis improbare atque respuere, si fortè invenerimus quòd aliter senserint quam Veritas habet, divino adjutorio vel ab aliis intellecta, vel à nobis. Talis ego sum in scriptis aliorum, tales volo esse intellectores meorum.*