

CHAPTERS ON THE TE DEUM

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649415984

Chapters on the Te Deum by Elizabeth M. A. F. Saxby

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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**CHAPTERS ON
THE TE DEUM**

Chapters on the Te Deum.

By the Author of "Earth's Many Voices."



LONDON:

J. MASTERS, 78 NEW BOND STREET.

MDCCLXXIII.

138. c. 167.



CHAPTERS ON THE TE DEUM.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

IN the old troubled times, when the Church had to make her way through the fiercest dangers and difficulties; and when every good soldier added to her army was a gain beyond price—one day, in those old troubled times, in the city of Milan, a certain soldier enlisted who was to be one of the Church's stoutest defenders.

The name of this soldier was Augustine.

His enlistment, I need hardly say, was his baptism; and he was baptized by a man as great and as devoted as he afterwards became—Ambrose, Bishop of Milan.

There are certain other men like these, whose names appear throughout the first ages

of the Christian Church like stars shining in a dark sky. Some of these names gleam more brightly than others; but all, in their greater or less degree, make together one glorious group in that darkness; shining, according to the promise to those who spread widely the Kingdom of God, "as the stars for ever and ever."

These great men are known to us as the Fathers of the Christian Church. The influence of their holy lives is still upon us; and we use the prayers they taught us, and the forms of creed which they perfected and defended; and their teachings and their experiences are our rich inheritance.

The lives of some of these Christian Fathers are mixed up with sacred history. There is S. Ignatius, who was a child when our Lord was crucified; who saw Him after His Resurrection, and who is sometimes said to have been one of those little children whom He blessed. There is S. Polycarp, the Bishop or Angel of the Church of Smyrna, to whom the Lord sent the message in the Revelation—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life;" and

when we think that these and others of that Fatherhood were martyrs for the Faith, and that all passed their lives in defending it, we shall say that they have a claim on our veneration only second to the claim of the Holy Apostles themselves.

But to go back to him with whom this chapter began.

The life of S. Augustine is of course a matter of history. We read how he fell into errors of life and faith; how his good mother, Monica, prayed for him; how God answered her prayers by guiding him to the city of Milan, where he heard the teaching of Ambrose the Bishop; and how that teaching brought him to the true faith; and, finally, crowning all, to holy baptism. After that, we see how, like S. Paul saying directly God's light shone upon him, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" he set his whole life to serve God, until we find him at last one of the holiest Bishops and Fathers of the early Church.

But beyond all this, which is, as we have said, a matter of history, there is linked with the memory of S. Augustine a beautiful old

tradition which we love, because it gives to one of the gems of our priceless Prayer-Book an interest over and above its intrinsic worth, and draws out some beauties which might not show so brightly in any other light.

This tradition concerns the Baptism, and the hymn of praise which was sung by the Bishop and his convert as they came up from the water.

We can fancy that it must have been a very solemn hymn which could befit that moment. Let us picture to ourselves the scene.

Not a quiet household festival, as a baptism mostly is with us. No quiet church, with its font wreathed with flowers, and the group of friends gathered round it, and a little child lying in the arms of the priest, and the voices of a congregation of Christian worshippers sometimes joining in a prayer, sometimes sealing it with an "Amen."

We have, instead, to picture to ourselves the sunny skies of Italy, the pure baptismal river, the white-robed convert descending into the water, the spectators assembled on

the river bank. Some, such as the thankful mother, were there no doubt rejoicing; some were there no doubt in scoffing and enmity. Here was a man of gifts and of scholarship—a man to whom the world promised much bright fame and favour—giving up that promise for the service of the cross. A little child in spirit only, here was Christ's soldier and servant stepping forth straightway from his baptism to the thick of the Christian fight.

To any mind that must have been a fine scene to witness; but it was more than that. It was a moment of thanksgiving for the soul that was washed, and for the saint who led it to its baptism. Was it not, also, a moment of thanksgiving for the Church, who gained there and then her faithful defender?

More than that, again, it must have been a moment for "joy in the presence of the angels of God."

Cannot we fancy how they who sang together and shouted for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid—who sang together and shouted for joy again at Bethlehem over the foundation of God's yet