

EXPLANATION
OF THE
PSALMS AND CANTICLES
IN THE
DIVINE OFFICE.

BY
S. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI,
DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH.

TRANSLATED BY
THE REV. T. LIVIUS, C.S.S.R.

WITH A PREFACE BY
HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL MANNING.

LONDON : BURNS AND OATES LTD.
NEW YORK : CATHOLIC PUBLICATION SOCIETY CO.

Permissu Superiorum.

Nihil Obstat.

T. E. BRIDGETT, C.SS.R.,

Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur.

HENRICUS EDUARDUS,

Card. Archiepiscopus.

In Festo Assumptionis B.M.V., 1887.

TO THE

Right Rev. Robert Cornthwaite,

LORD BISHOP OF LEEDS.

MY DEAR LORD,

I DEEM MYSELF HAPPY IN DEDICATING THIS "EXPLANATION OF THE PSALMS" BY MY HOLY FATHER S. ALPHONSUS TO YOUR LORDSHIP, WHO WELL-NIGH A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO EXPRESSED TO ME YOUR EARNEST DESIRE THAT ITS ITALIAN ORIGINAL SHOULD BE RENDERED INTO ENGLISH, AS BEING, IN YOUR OPINION, AMONGST ALL HIS WORKS, THAT ONE WHICH WOULD BE ESPECIALLY OF INTEREST AND PROFIT TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS, AND THE FAITHFUL IN GENERAL; AND WHO YOURSELF SOON AFTERWARDS COMMENCED ITS TRANSLATION, WHICH THE PRESSURE OF YOUR MORE IMMEDIATE EPISCOPAL DUTIES ALONE PREVENTED YOU FROM COMPLETING.

I AM, WITH MUCH RESPECT,

YOUR DEVOTED SERVANT IN CHRIST,

T. LIVIUS, C.S.S.R.

BISHOP ETON, LIVERPOOL,

THE CENTENARY FEAST OF S. ALPHONSUS, AUG. 2, 1887.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

S. ALPHONSUS, in a letter to Don Xavier Mattei, to whose Metrical Version of the Psalter and Commentary he so often refers with such great praise, speaks of his own book as his little work on the Psalms, composed under the pressure of heavy episcopal cares, old age, and much bodily infirmity. He did not propose it as an exhaustive volume for learned students in Biblical science; but, urged by charitable zeal, wrote it for the benefit of such as were on this matter the most in need of instruction: as he says himself in his Dedication to Clement the Fourteenth.

However, this unpretending little work of the Saint, on its first appearance, met at once in Italy with a universal welcome, and received the highest commendation from all the theologians and learned men of the day for its wide and solid erudition, its spirit of piety, and its great utility, not only to Ecclesiastics and Religious, but also to all Catholics in general. It has merited, moreover, to obtain the special eulogium and approbation of the Holy See, through the particular

mention made of it in the Decree of March 23rd, 1871, which conferred on S. Alphonsus the glorious title of Doctor of the Church. It is there spoken of in the following terms:—"Lastly, he unlocked the hidden secrets of the Sacred Scriptures, as well in his Ascetical treatises, which are full of a peculiar heavenly sweetness, as in that most sound and wholesome Commentary, wherein, to aid the devotion and spiritual instruction of ecclesiastics, he has explained the Psalms and Canticles which they have to recite in the Divine Office." This work of S. Alphonsus on the Psalms is one that has hitherto been almost unknown in these countries; and its translation has been long desired by several Bishops and Priests, as well as by many Religious. It will serve for the profit of all the devout Faithful, and will, we would fain hope, supply a want that is very generally felt by Catholics to exist in English Sacred literature.

In rendering into English the original work of the holy Doctor, we have found it necessary to modify to some extent the arrangement of the Italian text, in which the Saint's literal translation at one time, or his paraphrase at another, of the Latin, is for the most part not continuous, but interrupted by frequent parenthetical remarks of comment or criticism; whilst sometimes he does not give any translation, strictly speaking, of a verse at all, but enters at once into explanation or paraphrase.

On this account, then, after taking mature advice, we have judged it best, for the convenience and profit of the reader, to set by the side of the Latin the literal

English version.¹ Hence, we have not repeated so much of the text of S. Alphonsus as is simply identical with that translation; but, at the] same time, we have been very careful not to omit anything that the holy Doctor himself says in each verse by way of different rendering, paraphrase, or explanatory comment.

For much in this method, and for many of the footnotes, which are added for the reader's profit, but are all wholly distinct from the Saint's Commentary, we are indebted to the French translation of the work by the late Père Dujardin, C.S.S.R.² The few notes by the Translator have *Tr.* appended to them.

The present year 1887 has been especially chosen for our Translation, as that in which falls (August 2nd) the first Centenary Anniversary of the holy death of the Saint: and this little work is intended as a slight tribute of honour and filial piety to their Father on the part of all his children in these lands, in commemoration of that blessed event.

¹ For this, we have adopted the Douay Version of the Psalms, as revised by the late Archbishop Kenrick, of Baltimore, and Cardinal Wiseman, and especially approved of by His Eminence Cardinal Manning. (*The Book of Psalms.* Burns & Oates, 1878.) We have, at the same time, reproduced the Titles of the Psalms and several of the Notes given in that Edition.

² *Œuvres Complètes de S. Alphonse de Liguori.* Tome xv. Tournai, 1875.

O Doctor optime,
Ecclesiæ Sancte Lumen,
Beate Alphonse Maria,
Divinæ legis Amator,
Deprecare pro nobis
Filius Dei.

Amen.

O most admirable Doctor,
Light of the Holy Church,
Blessed Alphonsus Mary,
Lover of the Divine Law,
Pray for us to the
Son of God.

Amen.

PREFACE BY HIS EMINENCE
CARDINAL MANNING.

S. AUGUSTINE says that all the history and the prophecy of the Old Testament is to be found in the Book of Psalms. It contains also the theology which, from Adam to Abraham and from Abraham to the Incarnation, was the inheritance of all who lived by faith. In the midst of the theosophies of the East and the idolatries of the West, the pure theism of Israel ran as the river of life. The knowledge of the One True God, Whom no man had ever seen, or could see, in all the fulness of His perfections of holiness, justice, truth, mercy, wisdom, and power, elevated and unfolded the spiritual life of the Hebrew race above all nations of the world. When our Divine Lord said, "God is a Spirit, and they that adore Him must adore Him in spirit and in truth," He was not revealing a new and unknown truth, but appealing to the pure and primeval conception of God, inherited by Israel, and even by Samaria. "The Lord is my light," and "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet," are a theology so perfect, that it has run on into the Catholic Church as the river that makes glad the City of God. Even now in the full light of the Incarnation, and of the Holy Trinity,

the Church makes the Book of Psalms the chief devotion of its priests and people. Seven times a day we give thanks and offer praise to God, in union with the Heavenly Court; but it is chiefly in the very words of the Book of Psalms. No song of praise and thanksgiving more perfect has ever been found. In this the Church of Israel and the Church of Christ are one. The words of the Holy Ghost abide for ever.

For all who are bound to the daily recital of the Divine Office, it is of vital interest that they should be able to give not only a material, but also an intellectual, attention to the Psalms. It is indeed true that the fervent intention of the simple will prevail with God, even when the intellectual apprehension of the Psalms may be imperfect. It is with all a question of degree. The most learned will not apprehend all, and the least learned will apprehend much of the inspired words.

Nevertheless, the work of bringing the Psalms home to us in English, as S. Alphonsus did in their vernacular to Italians, is of the highest utility. It will greatly help our intellectual attention in reciting the Office, and thereby make it the source of light and of sweetness in various measures both to the simple and to the learned. F. Livius has therefore, by his patient industry, bestowed upon us a gift for which we all owe him cordial thanks.

HENRY EDWARD,

Cardinal Archbishop.

EXPLANATION
OF THE PSALMS AND CANTICLES IN THE
DIVINE OFFICE.

TO HIS HOLINESS POPE CLEMENT XIV.

MOST HOLY FATHER,

As the present work has been composed in the last years of my life,—for I am now decrepit and in daily expectation of death,—and as it treats of the Psalms of David, the recitation of which, after the ministration of the sacraments and of the divine word, is the holiest occupation of persons consecrated to God ;—since to celebrate the praises of the Lord is to do here below what the Angels are doing in heaven ; —I have thought that to no one could I more appropriately dedicate this book than to Your Holiness, who is the Head of the Church, and holds on earth the place of Jesus Christ. I will not here pause to enumerate all the many encomiums which Your Holiness deserves by a thousand titles ; hence, to spare Your modesty, I refrain from praising in particular the bright examples of virtue You have shown before the whole world by Your mortified life, Your detachment

from relatives, and Your freedom from all human respect; but I cannot pass over in silence that most admirable prudence of which Your Holiness has given proof, through the adoption of so many wise measures, whereby You have succeeded in allaying the differences that were troubling the friends of the Church's weal.

I venture to hope that Your Holiness will be pleased graciously to accept this my work, as one that may be useful to all those who recite the Divine Office; amongst whom there are many who, from their little knowledge of the Latin language, understand imperfectly the meaning of the words, and still less the sense of the Psalms; and this all the more, because the greater number of them are so difficult of comprehension that it is only with much pains even the learned arrive at their right meaning.

It is true that many commentators have already undertaken to explain the Psalms; but because they have either written in Latin, or in a not sufficiently simple style, their works are not found so generally useful as might be wished. For this reason I have done my best to render their sense intelligible, so that all in reciting the Canonical Hours may understand well what they say, and may consequently recite them with more attention.

I lay, then, this my book at the feet of Your Holiness, praying You to correct it, if it merits correction, and to bless it if You think it may be of any service to the Faithful.

Prostrate at Your Pontifical throne, I devoutly

kiss Your feet, and humbly ask Your holy benediction.

Remaining always

Your Holiness' humble, devoted, and obedient
son and servant,

ALFONSO MARIA,

Bishop of S. Agatha of the Goths.

INTRODUCTION.

DESIGN OF THE WORK.

1. THE FRUIT TO BE DERIVED FROM THE RECITATION OF THE PSALMS.

Cardinal Bellarmine, in the preface to his Commentary on the Psalms, says that the Psalter is a compendium of the whole of the Old Testament; for whatever Moses has written with regard to Sacred History and the Law, and whatever the other Prophets have said, all is found in the Psalms, as S. Augustine observes: "The Book of Psalms contains whatever things are useful in all (the Canonical Books), and is a sort of common treasury of good devotion, well suited to supply what is necessary to everyone."¹

It needs indeed but slight attention for us to see that the Psalms are full of divine lights, of holy instructions, of fervent prayers, and of special prophecies, relating particularly to the Redemption wrought by Jesus Christ. We draw attention to the Psalms II., XV., XXI., XLIV., LXVIII., and to other Psalms also, in which the Psalmist clearly foretells the reign of Jesus

¹ *Præf. in Ps.*

Christ, His Birth, His preaching, His miracles, His Passion, His Resurrection, His Ascension into heaven, and the propagation of the Church, according to what He Himself declared to His disciples: "All things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the Law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning Me" (*Luke* xxiv. 44).

The Psalms breathe throughout sentiments of divine love, of patience, of humility, of meekness, of forgetfulness of injuries, of strength of soul, and of confidence in God; hence in reciting the Office we should apply to ourselves all the sentiments and all the acts that the Psalmist elicits of holy fear, of confidence in God, of thanksgiving, of good desires, of humility, of offering, of love, and of praise; and especially all the prayers that he makes for pardon, light, and help; for the Lord, having destined the Psalms to be recited by the whole Church, certainly intended that everyone in reciting them should apply to his own particular case the acts and prayers which the Psalmist made for himself.

With regard to the prayers which the Royal Prophet addressed to God for the Hebrew people, we should have the intention of offering them up for all Christians. When David speaks of his enemies, he is generally understood, according to the literal sense, to refer to those who persecuted him; but for ourselves we should apply these words to the evil spirits who are our worst enemies, since they seek to deprive us not only of the life of the body, but also of the life of the soul.

2. THE DIFFICULTIES TO BE FOUND IN THE PSALMS.

Many of the Psalms are easy to understand; but many others are difficult and obscure. Hence the Holy Fathers gave all their attention to render them intelligible, as well for the explanation of dogmas and moral precepts, as for preaching, and for the general profit of all the faithful.

For myself, in the present work, where the verses are more easy, I shall give a simple translation, in order that those who are bound to recite the Canonical Hours, understanding what they say and savouring the heavenly maxims and holy affections contained in the Psalms, may thus recite them with more attention, and with greater spiritual profit. Oh! how great is the merit of a single Office recited with devotion!

With regard to the obscure passages, I own that when I first thought of undertaking this work, I looked upon it as an easy task, considering the abundant provision I had made of excellent commentators; but when once I set to work, I found it very difficult and laborious: so much so, that in several places I was at times embarrassed and undecided as to which amongst the different explanations given by the commentators I ought to adopt. Sometimes I spent a whole hour in interpreting a verse, and after consulting a great number of authors, I remained more perplexed than ever at seeing before me so many different opinions.

At length, not to give up the work altogether, I resolved not to state in it all the various explanations of commentators, nor all the questions raised by the

learned, but to confine myself to the interpretations which seemed to me most commonly adopted and were most in conformity with the Vulgate: this is the rule that I have followed. Xavier Mattei, in his learned and laborious metrical translation of the Psalms, justly remarks that modern critics, especially Protestants, no sooner find some version differing from the Vulgate, than they eagerly embrace it, without examining into its merits or demerits.

Some, no doubt, will say, that after so many explanations of the Psalms given by commentators, this work of mine appears superfluous. I confess, however, that it has been of great benefit, at least to myself; for since making this translation, I find that I recite the Office with more attention than formerly, when I used to read many passages without understanding their meaning; and this makes me hope that others may derive from it the same profit. I have, moreover, thought it desirable to arrange my translation according to the order, not of the Psalter, but of the Breviary, for the greater convenience of those who have to recite the Divine Office.

3. THE HEBREW TEXT AND THE VERSIONS.

There can be no doubt that, strictly and antecedently speaking (*per se*), the Hebrew text, being the original, is to be preferred to all the Versions; but according to the teaching of the greater number of the learned, the original Hebrew is not wholly free from corruption: some say, with Salmeron and Morinus, that it was corrupted by the Jews, out of hatred to

the Christian religion ; others, with Cardinal Bellarmine, that many errors crept in, whether through ignorance, or by carelessness of copyists ; and especially because, since the fifth century, the Masorite Jewish doctors, have added to it the vowel points, which were not there before, and these points have given occasion for many equivocal and various interpretations. It was for this reason the Council of Trent would not declare the Hebrew text authentic, as it did the Latin text of the Vulgate, by saying that this latter is exempt from all error, at least in what concerns the dogmas of Faith and Moral precepts. Hence, Xavier Mattei, in his dissertation on the Tradition and Preservation of the Sacred Books, concludes that when there is any disagreement between the Hebrew text and the Vulgate, we should keep to the latter : “ Not,” says he, “ that this version is more authentic than the original, but because it may be presumed that the original in the ancient manuscripts was different in such a passage from what it is now, and that the genuine text was that which was made use of by the Author of the Vulgate, which has merited to be approved by the Church.” We should, moreover, be persuaded that there are in the Psalms many verses so obscure, that it is impossible, whatever pains one takes, to discover their certain meaning, without an extraordinary divine illumination.

It is, then, admitted on all hands, as we have just said, that the Versions ought, properly speaking, all to be corrected according to the Hebrew text, as being the original, and yet that this rule at the present day

is anything but a safe one, because this text, as we now have it, is full of faults in transcription or impression, and because the vowel points introduced into the orthography by the Rabbinites have given room for many ambiguities, and even for errors. The result of this is : (1) That the Hebrew text is variously interpreted, by some in one way, by others in another ; (2) that the sense of the Psalms, as several commentators justly observe, is less discoverable from the original text than from the versions that have been made of it, particularly the Septuagint, which is considered to be the most exact, because it was made at the time when the Hebrew text was more pure.

Besides, the Latin Version of the Vulgate, which S. Augustine¹ calls *Itala*, and S. Gregory *Vetus* (Ancient), though unadorned in style, is nevertheless the best ; and its excellence is enhanced from the fact of its having been in use in the primitive Church after it had been corrected by S. Jerome from the Septuagint version. It is well to remark here that S. Jerome afterwards made another translation of the Psalms directly from the Hebrew text ; but this second translation, as Estius² remarks, was not received by the faithful, especially the Monks, from their objecting to change the ancient Psalmody. Hence it has been the practice ever since, to recite the Psalms according to the first translation, corrected by the holy Doctor. We have, moreover, in these later times, the Decree of the Council of Trent,³ which has declared that the

¹ *De Doctr. chr.* l. ii. c. 5.

² *In Ps.* i.

³ *Sess.* iv.

Vulgate is free from all substantial error ; so that this version is for us the safest ; the Council having said : “If anyone will not receive as sacred and canonical the entire Books themselves with all their parts, as they have been used to be read in the Catholic Church, and are found in the ancient Latin Vulgate edition, . . . and should knowingly and of aforethought contemn them, let him be anathema.” And afterwards, in the Decree : “The Holy Synod rules and declares, that this same ancient and Vulgate edition, which by long use of so many centuries has been approved of in the Church herself in her public lections, is to be accounted authentic, and no one, for any pretext whatever, may dare or presume to reject it.”

Consequently, in the present Translation we shall, for the most part, keep closely to the Vulgate version, which is for us, undoubtedly, the most safe, as being exempt from all error in what is substantial ; and we shall do so the more, because the Vulgate is often in accordance with the Septuagint version, the authors of which had at the time they wrote the Hebrew text in a purer state than we have now. I say this for yet another reason : my object, as I explained in the beginning, is to enable those who say the Office to understand as well as possible the Psalms they recite ; and these are found in the Divine Office exactly as they are in the Vulgate, as Urban VIII. says in his Bull *Divinam Psalmodyam*, the summary of which stands at the head of the Breviary. For this reason I shall keep, as a rule, closely to the letter of the

Psalms as they are in the Divine Office ; nevertheless, in certain passages where the sense of the letter or of the text seems difficult to understand, I shall endeavour to explain it in other terms.

4. CERTAIN PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

Commentators discuss several other preliminary questions, viz. : (1) the authorship of the Psalms ; (2) their titles ; (3) the way in which they were composed, whether in verse or in prose. As regards these controverted points, I will now set forth in a few words the opinions most generally received, leaving the reader free to study the questions more at length in order to arrive at their truth so far as it may be ascertainable.

I. As to the authorship of the Psalms, it is undeniable that the holy king David composed at least a great part of them ; for the Bible says expressly that the hymns sung by the Levites in the Temple were the work of David, and it is evident that these hymns were the Psalms : “And the priests stood in their offices : and the Levites with their instruments of music of the Lord, which king David made to praise the Lord : because His mercy endureth for ever, singing the hymns of David by their ministry.”¹ Several of the Holy Fathers, as S. Augustine,² S. Chrysostom, Theodoret, and others, would make David the sole author of the Psalms ; but S. Hilary,³ S. Athanasius,⁴ S. Isidore of Pelusium, &c., are of opinion

¹ 2 *Par.* vii. 6.

² *De Civ. D.* l. xvii. c. 14.

³ *In Lib. Ps. prol.*

⁴ *Syn. S. Script.* l. xiii.

that many of the Psalms belong to other authors, especially those that bear in their titles the names of different personages, such as Asaph, Idithun, Ethan, &c. S. Jerome writes: "We affirm that all the Psalms have for their authors those whose names are placed in the several titles."¹ But, according to S. Augustine and Theodoret, these names were not the names of the authors, but rather the names of the chief singers or musicians. Nevertheless S. Jerome maintains his opinion and says: "Know that they err who think that all the Psalms were by David, and not by those with whose names they are inscribed."² And S. Augustine himself had no objection to say: "Not all the Psalms were put forth by David."³ Hence we may well conclude with Calmet,⁴ and according to the opinion most common, that the greater number of the Psalms are David's, but not all. Before we take leave of this point, let us recall what Theodoret says with much wisdom: "What much doth it profit me to know who were the several authors of different Psalms, since it is certain that all composed them by the power of the Spirit of God."⁵ S. Gregory the Great thus admirably expresses the same thought: "Since we hold the Holy Ghost to be the Author here, in our questions about the writer, what else are we doing but, whilst reading our letters, going in search after the pen?"⁶ We read, says he, the letters, and we know

¹ *Præf. in L. Ps. juxta Heb. ver.*

³ *In Ps. i. adnot.*

⁵ *In omnes Ps. prol.*

² *Ep. ad Cyprian.*

⁴ *Préf. gén. sur les Ps. n. 2.*

⁶ *Præf. in Job, c. 1.*

that they are divine: what boots it, then, thus to perplex ourselves by trying to find out the particular pen that wrote them?

II. With regard to the *Titles* of the Psalms, I may observe that this subject is so confused that the commentators, notwithstanding all their endeavours, have not been able to clear it up; for many of these Titles are ancient; some of them were added before the collection of Esdras without its being known by whom, and others were added in later times. It is for this reason that in the Septuagint version and in the Vulgate we read Titles that are not to be found in the Hebrew text. Moreover, it is doubtful whether the names given in the Titles are the names of the authors or those of the Cantors of the Psalms. In the face of these difficulties, I do not undertake to explain the Titles; but I shall set forth at the head of each Psalm a short summary of what it contains.

III. Lastly, the question is discussed among the learned whether the Psalms were composed in verse or in prose. Joseph Scaliger, in his Notes on the Chronicle of Eusebius, thinks, with other authors, that the Psalms are not rhythmical verse, but only an ornate prose, written, as he says, in a poetic style, and Calmet is also of this opinion; but more commonly the learned hold with S. Jerome that the Psalms were composed in verse. As to the form given to this verse, whether the metre had to have a certain fixed number of syllables, whether it was with or without rhyme—these are points which it is impossible now to determine, since we no longer know with any certainty what was

the character of ancient Hebrew poetry, and have in these days, at the most, but a very imperfect and no intimate knowledge at all of the Hebrew language ; besides, we are ignorant of its right pronunciation, because, through the introduction by the Rabbinitists of the use of points in the copies of the Bible, vowels are added or taken away, so that thereby the number of syllables has been increased or diminished. Xavier Mattei is of opinion that the poetical compositions of the Hebrews were in verses of free rhythm, without any fixed number of syllables or connecting link, and that they resembled the Choruses of the Greek Tragedies.

5. THE ATTENTION AND DEVOTION WHICH THE RECITATION OF THE DIVINE OFFICE DEMANDS.

Before beginning the explanation of the Psalms, I have thought that it will be useful for those who are bound to the recitation of the Divine Office, to offer here some reflections which may help much to recite it well ; that is, with attention and devotion.

All men ought to be continually occupied during the present life in praising the Lord, in thanking Him for His benefits, and in asking of Him the graces necessary for obtaining eternal salvation ; but because seculars live distracted with worldly affairs, the Church wills that ecclesiastics and religious of both sexes should be employed, at least at certain hours of the day, in praising God and praying to Him for all the faithful, as well as for the interests of the Holy Church.

For this reason, S. Thomas says that the Divine

Office is a common prayer which is offered to God on the part of the Church by her ministers in the name of the whole Christian people:¹ *Communis quidem oratio est, quæ per ministros Ecclesiæ, in persona totius fidelis populi, Deo offertur.* Elsewhere he says that the recitation of the Office is a public work laid upon the clergy for the edification of the Church, that is, for its conservation and increase: *Orationibus et Psalmis vacare in Ecclesia, Divinum Officium celebrando, est quoddam opus publicum ad Ecclesiæ ædificationem ordinatum.* And before him S. Bernard had already written that the three chief duties of ecclesiastics are to preach the word of God, to give good example to others, and to pray for all; but he adds that the duty of prayer is greater than the other two: *Manent tria hæc: verbum, exemplum, oratio; major autem his est oratio.*² We may hence infer how great will be the punishment those will receive from God in the next life who, being bound to the recitation of the Office, neglect this obligation, whether from wearisomeness, or in order to give themselves to worldly amusements. But I am not now speaking of these; I speak of those who say the Office, but say it ill. It is a pity to see with what irreverence some recite the Canonical Hours, saying them in the streets, or in view of everybody at a window looking at what passes below, or in conversation with friends, laughing and jesting, intermingling trifling words and jokes with the divine praises, without paying any attention to what they recite. If anyone behaved

¹ 2. 2. q. lxxxiii. a. 12.

² *Epist.* cci. n. 3.

thus when speaking to a prince, he would certainly be at once driven away and punished ; and yet there are those who dare thus to treat God, so that one would suppose they meant to dishonour rather than to honour Him !

On the other hand, very great is the merit, and the profit also, which they derive who say the Divine Office with attention. What lights are then obtained from the word of God, with what holy maxims is the soul penetrated ! How many good acts may one not make—acts of love, of confidence, of humility, of contrition—by paying attention to the verses one recites ! Above all, how many beautiful prayers are found in the Office, prayers which, if said with faith and fervour, will obtain for us treasures of grace, according to the infallible promise of our Lord that He will hear whoever prays to Him : “ Ask, and it shall be given you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth.”¹

I may add that when the Office is said without devotion, and with no other thought than to get over it as quickly as possible, it becomes a very heavy and wearisome burden, and seems as though it would never come to an end ; but, on the contrary, when it is recited with devotion, and with the desire to derive profit from it, by-applying the mind and the heart to what the lips pronounce, its burden becomes light and sweet : of this the Saints made good experience, who found more pleasure in saying the Divine Office than worldlings find in all their pastimes and amusements.

¹ *Matt.* vii. 7 ; *Luke* xi. 10.

One single Office recited with devotion may gain for us many degrees of glory ; what abundance of merits will not they, then, have acquired who thus recite it for thirty or forty years ! This thought has led me to undertake the labour of the present Translation : the end I have had in view is to help those who, by the duty of their state, are bound to recite the Divine Office, to do so with merit and profit to their souls, and not with demerit, and a conscience continually burdened with remorse and fear at the thought of having one day to render an account before the divine tribunal of their Office ill-said, and of having to be punished for this in the next life.

MATINS FOR SUNDAY.

MATINS FOR SUNDAY.

INVITATORY.—PSALM XCIV.

SEVERAL corrections have been made in this Psalm as it is found in the Psalter, which do not appear here in the Breviary, where it still remains as it was anciently recited. The Psalm, as S. Paul declares (*Heb. iii. 7, iv. 7*), directly refers to Jesus Christ, Who in it is set forth as God, Creator, and Saviour of the world: hence we are exhorted to praise Him, and to hearken to Him as our Supreme Pastor.

Praise of a canticle for David himself.¹

1. Venite, exultemus Domino, jubilemus Deo salutari nostro: præoccupemus faciem ejus in confessione, et in psalmis jubilemus ei. O come, let us exult in the Lord: let us rejoice before God our Saviour. Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving; and rejoice before Him with psalms.

“*Venite . . .*” O come, let us rejoice in the Lord, and sing with jubilee the praises of God our Saviour. Before the rising of the sun let us be found in His presence, praising Him and confessing our faults: let us rejoice exceedingly as we sing to His glory.—“*In confessione.*” S. Augustine says: *Est confessio laudantis, est confessio gementis*: “There is the confession of him who praises, and the confession of him who mourns”.

2. Quoniam Deus magnus Dominus, et Rex magnus super omnes deos: quoniam non repellet Dominus plebem suam, quia in manu ejus sunt omnes fines terræ, et altitudines montium ipse conspicit. For the Lord is a great God; and a great King above all gods. For in His hand are all the ends of the earth: and the heights of the mountains are His.

“*Omnes deos.*” All the false gods, and all the kings of earth.—“*Altitudines montium.*” *Earthly powers*, according to S. Augustine. That is to say: The Lord regards alike the height of the mountains and the depth of the valleys, that is, as much the powerful of the world, as the poor whom the

¹ For David, or to David: that is, inspired to David himself, or to be sung by him.