

Hymn for Ash Wednesday by Father Oakeley (d. 1880), a Catholic priest:

Ash Wednesday.

THE BLESSING AND IMPOSITION OF THE ASHES.



THE priest is clad, the altar set,
The worshippers have duly met ;
But sinners, ere the rite begin,
Must bow their heads in shame for sin.

With solemn acts, and holy prayers,
Their feast of tears the Church prepares ;
And gifts the brute and barren earth
With all but Sacramental worth.

Come then, ye meek and mourning trains,
And let the penitential grains
With humbling thoughts your hearts amend,
As at the altar-rails ye bend ;

Those rails where oft in faith ye knelt,
And GOD's good Presence saw and felt,
Where, as at Angel's bidding given,
Dropp'd on your tongues the Bread from heaven.

Who fain would joy must sorrow too,
Who hope for grace must penance do ;
Nor shun the Cross's present pain
Who court the Saints' immortal gain.

Hark, as, with silent step and slow,
The priest moves gently to and fro,
The calm Memento's note of fear
Bounds, like a knell, from ear to ear :

' Remember, mortal, thou art dust,'
Nor dare in gauds of earth to trust ;
Thy days to swift destruction tend,
Thine origin bespeaks thine end.

Thy life, with misery so fraught,
In nought begins, and ends in nought ;
The dust which form'd thee does but pave
The floor of thy half-open'd grave.

Remember, ere thy sun have set,
Lest, shouldst thou still thy peace forget,
Its forfeit joys be brought to mind
When Penance' plank is left behind.

Repent, and still in comfort here
Thy bruised heart His Voice shall cheer,
And His sweet Eucharistic Gift
Thine earth-born body still uplift.

So we but nurse that Living Seed,
This dust shall rise to life indeed ;
Who loves shall smile on earth's annoy ;
' Who sows in tears shall reap in joy.'