



**JAMES
BEAVEN**

***AN ACCOUNT
OF THE LIFE
AND WRITINGS
OF S. IRENÆUS,
BISHOP
OF LYONS AND
MARTYR***

James Beaven

An Account of the Life and Writings of S. Irenæus, Bishop of Lyons and Martyr

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DEDICATION.

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To the Memory
Of
Edward Burton, D.D.
Late Regius Professor Of Divinity In The University Of
Oxford,
By Whose Advice And Encouragement
The Author Of This Work
Was First Led To Study, With Care And Attention,
The Writings Of
This Father and Martyr.
It Is Now Dedicated And Inscribed;
As A Humble Acknowledgement Of His Extensive
Learning,
His Remarkable Singleness Of Mind,
And The Cordial Assistance He Ever Rendered
To Younger Travellers
In The Same Path Which He Himself Pursued.
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PREFACE.

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It was, perhaps, somewhat presumptuous in a person occupying so humble a station in the sacred ministry to offer to the Church a work which would necessarily induce

comparisons between itself and the similar productions of a Prelate of the Church—a Divine of the highest rank and character. The author can, however, at least say, that it was no foolish ambition which led to his employing himself on such a work. Having been led by circumstances to a repeated perusal and study of the writings of S. Irenæus, he saw the great value of his testimony to the leading principles and doctrines of the Church of England. He had himself derived much benefit from the works of Bishop Kaye on others of the Fathers; he thought that if he could do nothing more than to draw out the substance of the doctrine and opinions of Irenæus for the use of the student in theology, in a more accessible form than that in which he himself had to look for it, accompanied by the text of the portions from which he had formed his statements, [pg vi] and with a little illustration of the meaning in passages liable to misunderstanding,—he should have rendered a service to his younger brethren: and if it should so happen that that distinguished Prelate or any other writer did anticipate him, it would be so much clear gain to himself to have been so employed. When he had completed his first preparations, and had learnt by proper inquiry that the Illustrator of Justin, Clement, and Tertullian was not engaged on Irenæus, he endeavoured to put the work somewhat into form: and being afterwards encouraged by one upon whose judgment and acquirements public opinion had set its stamp, and who had seen portions of the work, to believe that it possessed a certain degree of value,—he ventured to bring it into public notice in the only way which appeared open to him.

He desires here to record his sense of the most kind and most hearty encouragement he has met with from persons of all ranks and classes, capable of appreciating a work of this description, or of aiding in its publication: more especially of that afforded him by her Majesty The Queen Dowager, by the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Prelates who have honoured him with their support, by the many persons distinguished either for station or for literary eminence, whose names will be found in the subjoined list, and by the warm-hearted friends, both of the clergy and of the laity, with whom he is either locally or personally connected.

His work, such as it is, he now sends forth, trusting that, through the blessing of the Divine Head of the Church, it may be available to the great ends of the [pg vii] ministry to which he has been called, and may tend to the unity, the strength, and the stability of the Church.

Before, however, he takes his leave of his readers, he wishes to add a few words on the Right Use of the Writings of the Fathers.

1. We use them as we do the writings of secular authors, to ascertain the *facts* of the *history* of their own or of preceding times; principally as concerning the Church, and secondarily as concerning the world. To this use of them no objection in principle can be raised; and in so doing, we treat them exactly as we do ordinary writers.

2. We use them, as *evidence* of the state of the Church, in their own and preceding ages, as regards either *discipline* or *morals*. In regard to the former, as it is a thing not in its nature liable to hasty alteration,—discipline established in

one age continuing on, for the most part, into the next,—their testimony will avail for the immediately preceding generation, as well as for their own. In regard to the latter, it can scarcely be received for any thing anterior to their own age, unless where they record the observations of some older person. In both, moreover, it requires to be noted whether they are writing controversially or historically: because we all know that through the imperfection of our nature we are apt to overstate our own case, and to understate that of our opponents. And if that is the case now, when a more extended and more accurate education has disciplined the minds of writers to impartiality, how much more must it have been so in an earlier stage of controversial writing, when there had been no opportunity [pg viii] for any such discipline. It is necessary, therefore, in the perusal of their controversial writings to be on our guard, and to notice, in any particular case, whether the mind of the writer is likely to have been influenced in his statements by any such bias. It must be remembered, moreover, that no individual author can be considered as evidence for the state of the universal Church, unless we have sufficient proof that he had means of knowing the condition of the whole Church, and unless we can gather that, being so qualified, he intends to speak thus largely.

Again, when not writing controversially, if we are aware that they laboured under any particular prejudice or bias, either towards any particular opinion or state of feeling, or against any particular class or individual, which is liable to affect their statements,—then likewise we must view them with caution.

On the other hand, when we have no evidence of any circumstance likely to pervert their perceptions, or to exaggerate their statements, it is obvious that they must be taken at their full value.

3. We use the Fathers as evidence of the *doctrine* which was taught by the Church, in their own and preceding ages. And here some of the remarks just made will apply again. The Fathers, like all other writers, sometimes state their own individual opinions, or the views of doctrine which prevailed in the sect or party to which they were attached, or in the particular part of the Church in which they were placed, or in the age in which they lived: at other times, and more frequently, the doctrines of the whole Church, in [pg ix] their own and all preceding ages. Now, where a writer states that what he is saying is held by the whole Church, unless we know any thing to the contrary, it is reasonable to believe that it was the case; because we know that the tradition of doctrine was, for the most part, jealously kept up by the perpetual intercourse and communication between the bishops of the several churches. And so again, where a writer affirms that any particular doctrine has been handed down from the beginning, unless we have opposing evidence, it is reasonable to take his word; because we know that it was the custom and practice of the whole Church to require every new bishop to confess the doctrine *already received*, and to teach its doctrines to new converts as already received. And, at all events, such a statement is conclusive evidence, that such doctrine had come down from a generation or two preceding that of the writer; unless (as was said before) we have proof to the contrary.

But, as has been already stated, it is possible for an individual to be led away by controversy, or prejudice, or party bias; and therefore, when he is manifestly under any such influence, it is well to be on our guard. For that and other reasons, in any matter of serious doubt, it is impossible to rest upon the word of any single writer; but we use him as a link in the chain of evidence as to the doctrine taught from the beginning by the united universal Church.

4. We use them to aid us in interpreting the text of Scripture. For many of them quote very largely from the Sacred Volume; and as some lived near apostolical times, and many wrote in the language in which the New Testament was written, whilst others were persons of great [pg x] inquiry and learning, and lived nearer to the localities of the sacred events than we do,—they had advantages which we do not possess. When, therefore, several or many of them concur in giving one uniform meaning to particular passages of Scripture, the evidence becomes very strong that they had the right interpretation: and even where only one writer gives any assistance upon any particular text, we shall frequently see reason for accepting his acceptance of it in preference to more modern suggestions. At the same time it is necessary to bear in mind, that most of them knew nothing of the original language of the Old Testament; and that they are often only *applying* passages according to the prevalent habit (countenanced indeed by our Lord and his Apostles, but carried to various degrees of excess by most of the early writers) of seeking for mystical accommodations: and we must distinguish between application and interpretation.

Now these methods of employing the writings of the Fathers are à priori so obvious and so unobjectionable, that few writers of any credit object to the principle: but as the results of the application of the principle are highly inconvenient to those who have rejected the doctrine or discipline universally upheld in the primitive ages of the Church, two lines of argument have been taken to nullify this application. And as they have been lately revived in various ways, and particularly by the re-publication of the work from which most of them have been derived, viz. Daillé's Treatise on the Right Use of the Fathers, I have thought proper to notice them in that brief manner which the limits of a preface permit. Some, indeed, of the objections brought forward ought to be considered as simply [pg xi] cautions to the inquirer, and as such I have already treated them; the chief remaining ones I now proceed to mention.

(1.) Some contend that, however reasonable in the abstract this sort of appeal to the Fathers may appear, it is beset with such difficulties, that it is useless in practice: that we have so few early writings, that those we have are so adulterated, that we have so many forgeries in the names of early writers, that the writings of the Fathers are so difficult to understand, that they so often give the opinions of others without any intimation that they are not their own, that they so constantly altered their views as they grew older, and that it so frequently happened that the men who are now of most note were in a minority of their contemporaries,—that it is practically useless to attempt to apply the Fathers to modern use.

Now I do not deny that there is something in these difficulties; otherwise they would not have been brought forward at all. No doubt we have but few writings of sub-apostolical times: but then we must use such as we have, and illustrate their sense by such methods as are in our power; and we shall find that they give a clear and consistent testimony to several important matters, both of doctrine and of discipline. It might be true, when Daillé first wrote, that the very important epistles of S. Ignatius were much adulterated: but it is not so now; the genuine copies having become known to the world in his time: neither is it true to any considerable extent of subsequent writers; and when it is, it simply presents a difficulty, which must be surmounted as we best can, or must cast a doubt over any particular writing. Sermons [pg xii] and popular treatises of writers of note were often altered in transcribing; just as we, in these days, re-publish popular books with omissions and alterations suited to the change of times, or to the shade of difference between our own views and those of the writer: and for that reason works of that description, however useful for devotional reading and instruction, must be brought forward in controversy with more caution than others, and sometimes set aside altogether. In short there is need of judgment and discrimination in the use of the Fathers; and that is the whole amount of this difficulty. With regard to the difficulty of understanding them, that is of course a matter of degree, dependent upon the acquaintance of the student with the original languages, as used in the age and country of the writers, upon his acquaintance with Church history and the state of

controversy, upon the degree of prejudice or false doctrine with which his own mind is imbued: but I do not think that they present nearly so much difficulty as the Platonical writers, which many persons study with great interest. As to the Fathers giving the opinions of others without intimating that they are so, that is no more than St. Paul himself does; and it very seldom occurs. So no doubt, like all other persons, they modify their views and occasionally change them, as they grow older: but that is, for the most part, only in subordinate matters, and it is very rarely that the circumstance presents any practical difficulty. Finally, that men whose name has become great amongst posterity were in a minority in their own age, is no doubt true in some instances: but when it is so, it can be ascertained, and must be allowed for; and when it cannot be ascertained it must not be surmised. And even where they were so, as in the case of Athanasius, they may be [pg xiii] connected with a majority in preceding and subsequent ages.

So that these objections are partly such difficulties as occur in every study, (but stated with much exaggeration,) and partly flimsy unpractical cavils, not worth dwelling upon.

(2.) But supposing that the writings of the Fathers are intelligible upon many points, another class of objections arises. It is asserted that they were themselves often mistaken, that they even contradict one another, and in short that no class or party is really willing to abide by their decision.

Here again, if they were mistaken, let it be shown by undoubted testimony (of Holy Writ or otherwise) that they

were mistaken: but let no one take for granted that because they differ from the received notions of our own age, they were therefore in error. It should never be forgotten that *every age has its errors*: and it may be, possibly, that wherein we differ from them the error is our own. No doubt each eminent writer then, as each eminent writer now, was in some respects mistaken. It is the simple condition of humanity to be liable to error. But as that does not cause us to refuse the testimony of our contemporaries, or their aid in the pursuit of truth, so it need not cause us to turn a deaf ear to the earlier writers. The circumstance that in some respects each was in error only renders their combined testimony to truth more weighty. It has indeed been asserted that they were all in error upon certain points: [pg xiv] but that assertion the Author has elsewhere¹ shown to be totally destitute of truth. Again, with regard to their contradictions of each other, where they do occur they should of course be noted; but the cases will be found to be of little practical importance; and their differences upon some points only place in a clearer light their agreement where they do agree. Lastly, as to the alleged fact that no class or party heartily accepts even the combined evidence of the Fathers, it is certainly true of two opposite parties; viz. the Roman Church and those Protestants who have rejected the Apostolical succession,—both setting up modern opinions to oppose or to explain away primitive doctrine: but it is not true of the Church of England, which (as has been frequently shown) both formally recognizes the consent of Catholic Doctors, and does in point of fact, in her public acts and documents, agree substantially in doctrine

and discipline with that consent, so far as it has yet been ascertained; whatever instances have been brought forward to the contrary being mistakes in matter of fact.

5. But besides this use of the Fathers as *evidence*, many persons attribute to them a certain degree of *authority*; and greater objection is felt to appealing to them as authority, than to using them as testimony. There are, however, very different ways of treating them as authority.

Now to quote sentences of the Fathers, as we do texts of Holy Writ, as being infallibly conclusive, (which has been [pg xv] done by writers of the Roman Church, especially before Daillé's time,) can only be done in ignorance or in bad faith; because every person acquainted with them knows that, like all uninspired writers, they differ from each other and from themselves. But if we simply quote them as persons whose opinion or testimony ought to have with us very great weight, either for what they were in themselves, or for the age in which they lived, this is a quite different matter; it is constantly done in the Homilies of the Church; and there surely can be no valid objection to it. We do not hesitate to appeal to the judgment of the great lights of our own Church, and to regard their dicta as not to be lightly questioned, partly for their own learning, judgment, and piety, (as Hooker, Sanderson, Wilson, Waterland,) partly for the era in which they flourished, (as Cranmer, Ridley, Jewel:) we give them authority over our own minds, and in deciding controversies between ourselves; and what valid objection can be raised to our giving corresponding weight to the worthies of more ancient times? And as the earliest writers conversed either with Apostles, or with those who had heard

the Apostles, it is natural to attribute greater weight to their words than to those of subsequent writers. And what if they do show whilst writing, that they had no anticipation of being guides to posterity? what if they caution us against trusting them implicitly, and recommend us to search the Scriptures for ourselves? what if they were sometimes in error? Do not all these circumstances apply to those more modern authors whom we do not hesitate to recognize as, in themselves, authorities? and why then should we be reluctant to yield to the more ancient that authority, as individuals, which all subsequent time has [pg xvi] accorded to them? Authority may be great without being infallible. Authority may have weighty influence upon the judgment without directly binding the conscience.

These remarks and arguments are capable of being stated much more fully, and of being illustrated by instances throughout; but to do so would require a separate treatise; and it has been thought better to produce them thus nakedly than to omit them altogether.

It is proper to state that the editions of Irenæus and of other Fathers referred to are chiefly the Benedictine: Clement of Alexandria is quoted in the edition of Klotz, and Eusebius in that of Zimmermann.

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CHAPTER I. LIFE OF S. IRENÆUS, AND GENERAL ACCOUNT OF HIS WRITINGS.

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If Polycarp is an object of great interest, as the disciple of St. John, and the hearer both of him and of other contemporaries of our Lord; if Justin is so, as having been the first man of eminent learning who came over from the walks of heathen philosophy to submit his mind to the doctrine of Christ; Irenæus, again, has claims upon our attention scarcely less, as having been brought up in the Christian faith under the eye of Polycarp; having, therefore, no previous tinge of Judaism or heathen philosophy, but imbued with Christian principles almost, if not quite, from his cradle, and at the same time displaying equal vigour of mind, if not equal knowledge of heathen learning, with either Justin or Clement of Alexandria². To these circumstances we are no doubt to attribute it, that there appear in his writings a [pg 002] greater justness of reasoning, and a more unexceptionable use of scripture, than is to be found in the writers of the Alexandrian school.

With regard to the time of his birth we know nothing certain. We find him *still a lad*, παῖς ὢν ἔτι³, listening to the Christian instruction of Polycarp, not long, as it would appear, before the death of that martyr. For, after saying⁴ that he had seen Polycarp [pg 003] *in the early part of his life*, ἐν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡλικίᾳ,—in order to account for what might appear improbable, viz., his being the contemporary of that martyr at all,—he says, that Polycarp lived to a very