

SAINT JEROME

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Saint Jerome by Father Largent & Hester Davenport

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FATHER LARGENT & HESTER DAVENPORT

SAINT JEROME

The Saints

SAINT JEROME

Saint Jerome

By Father Largent



*Translated by
Hester Davenport*

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PREFACE

ST JEROME, though one of the four "great" doctors of the Church, seems never to have been an object of any very tender personal devotion as other saints have been, his appeal being more directly to the head than to the heart. His sanctity and austerity is of the kind that awes rather than attracts, and is provocative of admiration rather than of imitation. For this reason he has been looked at with cool, temperate eyes; and since, moreover, he has so fully written himself down for us, there is little difficulty in discerning the broad outlines of his personality.

A strange, strong man, strenuous and intense even to the verge of ferocity, as was the fashion of his day with the champions of orthodoxy; nor is the fashion yet wholly obsolete, for all our longer study of the meekness of Christ. In him is exemplified the sort of antagonism that exists between delicacy of perception and strength of execution, and renders their equal development so rare in one and the same character. With great capacity in both directions, St Jerome seems alternately to sacrifice one of these interests to the other. In his zealous self-hatred it never occurred to him apparently that the difficulties he was contending with were more

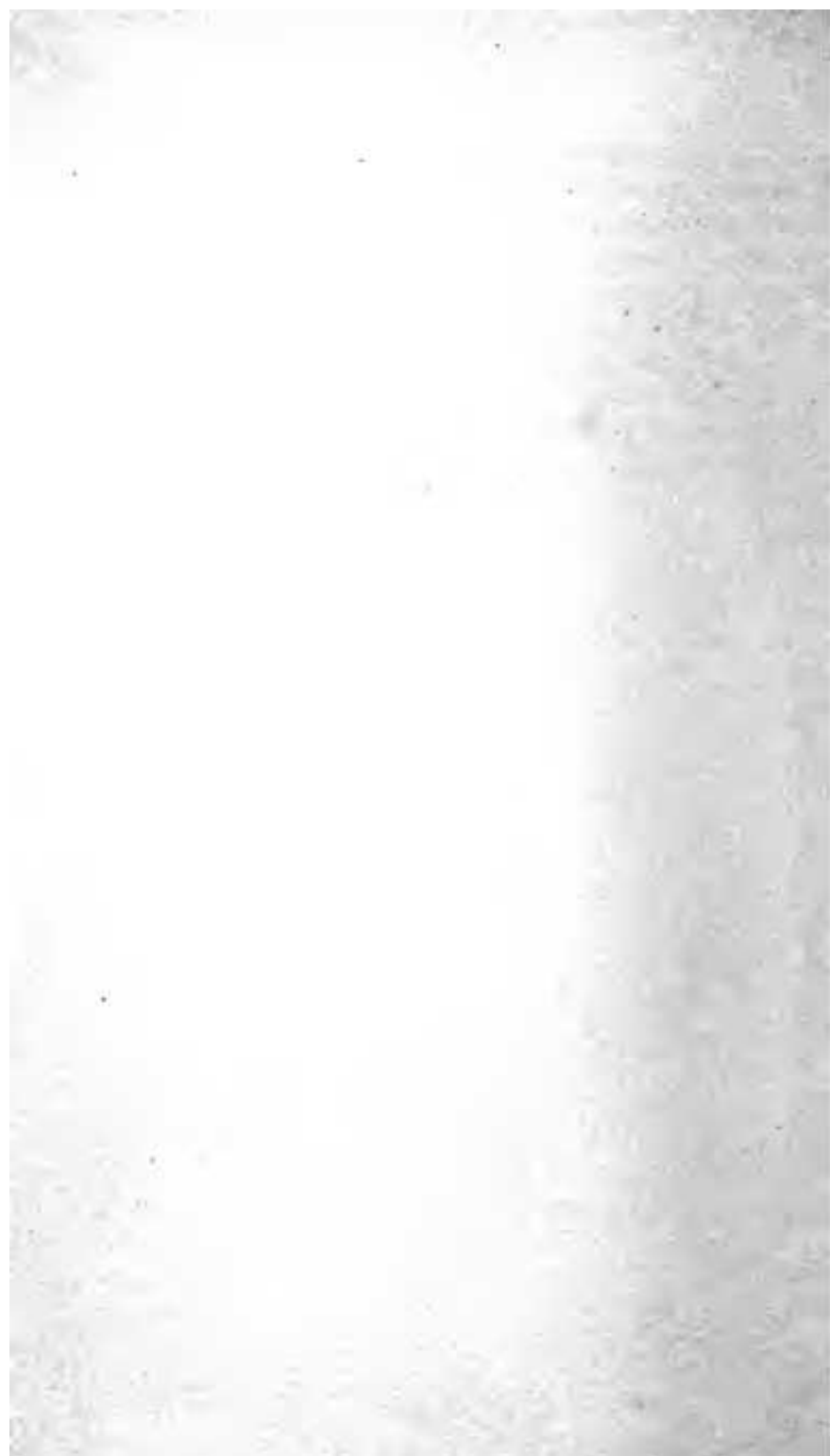
probably the effect of mental strain and nervous exhaustion than of an overplus of animal energy, and therefore were rather augmented than alleviated by his violent methods. In the feverish vision of his judgment before Christ's tribunal—embodying no doubt the state of his conscience at the time—the whole apparatus of secular learning by which he himself was subsequently enabled to become so acute an exponent and defender of the faith, and which the later Church blessed, sanctified, and consecrated to the service of religion, was condemned without qualification as repugnant to Christianity; even as the body and all natural affections were indiscriminately condemned as inimical to virtue and sanctity.

It is mainly to the gigantic force of his intellect, to his stupendous power of work, to his prodigious scholarship—as scholarship went in those days—that he owes his prominence in the history of Christianity. When we think of what he did, and did single-handed, for scriptural criticism and exegesis: how he created order and coherence where previously there had been wild chaos and confusion; how he expanded and applied the critical principles then in vogue as far as the material to hand would permit; we cannot help wondering what he would do, what he would be allowed to do, were he among us now, and were he master—as doubtless he would be—of the rich harvest of learning and information that has been accumulating during the intervening centuries. Would he regard his past work as final and irreformable, and view subsequent discoveries

with peevish suspicion; or would he welcome truth fearlessly from whatsoever quarter deriving? And the like doubt arises in regard to another eminent doctor—one who embraced and reconciled to the faith that same philosophy which the sub-apostolic Fathers had anathematised, and this, at a time when Peripateticism was in as little favour with Catholics as perhaps Hegelianism is now. What would he think now, what would he say, what would he do?

Doubtless a twentieth century Jerome or Aquinas would be to our day what he was to his own: he would take and give; he would see much good as well as some evil; much light as well as some darkness; he would delight as much in building up and uniting as rigid formalism does in sundering and destroying.

G. TYRRELL.



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