

**JEREMY
TAYLOR**

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Jeremy Taylor by Edmund Gosse

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ENGLISH MEN OF LETTERS

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Page 29

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PREFATORY NOTE

THIS volume contains a conscientious attempt to present for the first time a detailed biography of Jeremy Taylor. It is remarkable that the career of so eminent and so beloved a writer should not have attracted more attention from literary historians. But its incidents were neglected during the lifetime of those who could have remembered him, and were not made the object of inquiry until external evidence could no longer be obtained. The *Funeral Sermon*, published by George Rust, Bishop of Down, in 1668, is a document invaluable to the biographer, but it stands alone. Some particulars were added by Anthony à Wood, and some by Harris in his 1746 edition of the *Works* of Sir James Ware, who however died before Jeremy Taylor.

In the eighteenth century several efforts were made to collect notes for Taylor's memoirs, in particular by George Horne, Bishop of Norwich, and then by Thomas Zouch, the antiquary, but these were abandoned for lack of material. In 1793, to a volume of selections, Wheeldon prefixed a Life, which is a mere paraphrase of Rust, and is without independent value. The

Rev. Henry Kaye Bonney was the first to succeed in making original researches, which he used in his memoir of Jeremy Taylor published in 1815. This book, however, is inadequate and untrustworthy, and no one became more conscious of its defects than Bonney himself, who set himself to correct it, and who, when he heard that Heber was engaged in editing Jeremy Taylor, generously withdrew his book from circulation, and placed his corrections and fresh information in Heber's hands.

Every student of Jeremy Taylor owes a debt of gratitude to Reginald Heber, afterwards Bishop of Calcutta, for his edition of the text and for his careful commentary. He worked at the former when he was vicar of Hodnet, Salop, and he finished it just before he went out to India. The *Works* appeared in 1822, in fifteen volumes, and contained a Life which threw a flood of new light over the biography and bibliography of Jeremy Taylor. As was inevitable, however, in surveying a tract of literary history so long and so completely neglected, Heber's narrative contained a large number of misstatements, and he was moreover the victim of a mystification which will presently be referred to. His exile in India, and his premature death, prevented any revision of his valuable work. Meanwhile, J. S. Hughes, in 1831, prefixed to a selection from Taylor's *Works* a Life that has no biographical value. But in 1847 the Rev. Robert Aris Willmott, of Bearwood, published a very graceful

little book entitled *Bishop Jeremy Taylor, his Predecessors, Contemporaries, and Successors*, a sketch of the English Church in the seventeenth century, in the course of which he corrected Heber in some particulars, and added one or two fresh facts.

All these biographies were superseded, however, by the labours of the Rev. Charles Page Eden, fellow of Oriel, and vicar of St. Mary's, Oxford, who undertook the complete revision of Heber's *Jeremy Taylor*. His edition of the *Works*, which was in ten volumes, and occupied several years, was completed in 1854 by what was called volume i., which contained Heber's Life of Jeremy Taylor, corrected, enlarged, and supplied with voluminous notes. Eden was a fine scholar, and he must have been one of the most modest of men, for he concealed the importance of his work under the guise of a loyal fidelity to Heber. He is, therefore, scarcely named by the bibliographers, yet it is no more than justice to point out that it is his recension of Heber's memoir, very inconveniently arranged, indeed, being cumbered with notes and appendices, and hidden away in the midst of other editorial matter, which forms the only authoritative biography of Jeremy Taylor.

Since Eden's day, no Life of Taylor has been issued which can be named as having any independent value. For the collection of documents and quotation of authorities, his still remains the one entirely indispensable publication dealing with the career of the

Bishop. But, in the course of the fifty years which have elapsed since Eden put down his pen, the history of the seventeenth century has been greatly elucidated. At various points his narrative needs to be enlarged and corrected in detail, and it is with no sentiment but one of gratitude to Eden, and admiration of his scholarship, that the writer of this volume feels that the time has arrived for a more minute, and a more consecutive biography of Jeremy Taylor. In particular, the labour of Ulster church antiquaries has discovered, and has published in various fugitive forms, a great deal about the Bishop's Irish experiences which could not be known to Heber or to Eden. These have been well used in the short summary of Taylor's life, contributed by the Rev. T. B. Johnstone to the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

It is necessary, however, to speak of an element in the biography of Jeremy Taylor which has hitherto been accepted in every account of his life, and which I have slowly and reluctantly been obliged to reject. When Heber was collecting material for the 1822 edition, he was favoured with some manuscripts which he described as "among the most interesting hitherto recovered concerning Bishop Taylor's private concerns." They purported to be the papers of William Todd Jones of Homra, who had been occupied all his life, so it was averred, in collecting documents for a biography of Jeremy Taylor, from whom he was lineally descended "in the fifth degree." Mr. Jones