

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

FARRAR'S "LIVES OF THE FATHERS."¹

THE full title of Archdeacon Farrar's new work accurately describes it: *Lives of the Fathers: Sketches of Church History in Biography*; and the idea he has had in writing it may be gathered from the motto which he derives from Bishop Wordsworth and places on his title-page, "The history of the Church is represented in certain respects by the history of her great men." He has no intention of rivalling Bishop Lightfoot's *Apostolic Fathers*, or of earning so rare an encomium as was pronounced on that masterpiece by the most competent judge, Prof. Harnack, when he declared it to be "the most learned and careful patristic monograph which has appeared in the nineteenth century." His intention has been to "connect the history of the Church during the first four centuries with the lives of her principal Fathers and teachers." This has been admirably done by Böhringer in his *Kirchengeschichte in Biographieen*, a book which deserves to be translated and which is written in a style rarely attained by German theological writers. But Dr. Farrar has judged it expedient to give less attention to questions of abstract theology than Böhringer. This will be regretted by some readers, but unquestionably it will win for his book a wider popularity.

There can be no question that there was room for such a book as Dr. Farrar has given us. The Fathers have always attracted the learned labour of scholars, but in no age has so much been done as in our own to illuminate the first four centuries. The results of research and criticism lie scattered in monographs, in contributions to dictionaries, in the hints and papers of specialists. These results Dr. Farrar has brought together, has revised and analysed them, and uniting them with much research of his own, has presented them in an accessible and admirable form. Specialists may find that Dr. Farrar's omnivorous reading has not included some article or paper on a pet subject of their own; but undoubtedly the best literature, including the works of the Fathers themselves and the original material for their biography, has been not only under his eye, but has been well digested. His most remarkable omission suggests that other patristic students may

¹ *Lives of the Fathers: Sketches of Church History in Biography*. By Frederic W. Farrar, D.D., F.R.S. 2 vols. (Adam & Charles Black.)

also need to be informed that Mr. Ernest C. Richardson, librarian of Hartford Theological Seminary, has issued a *Bibliographical Synopsis* which is virtually a perfect guide to the bibliography of the ante-nicene Fathers. It is needless to say, for it has been manifest in all Dr. Farrar's writings, that he breathes easily and moves freely and gracefully under a ponderous mass of learning which would crush a less powerful man. How proud we all are to find him napping! It is a feather in the critic's cap to point out one mistake among a thousand facts which he reads for the first time. Unfortunately in this work Dr. Farrar gives the critic occasion. It was to be expected that where so much Greek is quoted, misprints should occur. The expectation is realized. The employment of a careful reviser would have prevented this, and would also have altered *puticoli* into *puticuli*, and saved Dr. Farrar from introducing three innovations into two lines from Milton. Disregard for trifles is an estimable feature in a man and in an author, and it is really of absolutely no consequence to Dr. Farrar's argument whether the Marsian war belongs to B.C. 40 or B.C. 90; but there are not wanting persons who will say that if he is incorrect in this, he will be incorrect in other statements. Into other mistakes of a similar kind he has been led by his authorities. Thus he says: "The bodies were largely taken from [the catacombs] by Pope Paul I. in A.D. 751, to save them from the relic-stealing propensities of Astaulph, king of the Goths." In fact, the ransacking of the tombs by Astaulph occurred in 752, and Paul did not attain the Papal dignity till 757, when Astaulph had already been dead for some years.

Sometimes Dr. Farrar's mistakes are more serious. The account he gives of the Ignatian Epistles is misleading. "The longer Greek recension consisted of fifteen letters, of which the Latin text was published in 1495 and in 1498, and the Greek text by Hartung in 1557. Three of these professed to be the correspondence of Ignatius with St. John and the Virgin, with her answer. They are stupid forgeries. There were, besides, Greek letters to Mary of Cassobola, the Tarsians, Philippians, the Antiochenes, and his successor Hero." These with the seven genuine epistles make up the fifteen. Now from this statement the uninitiated reader could certainly not gather the facts of the case, which are, that the Latin text of 1495 and 1498 contained respectively three and eleven letters, not fifteen; that the edition

published by Hartung in 1557 contained the Greek text of only twelve epistles; and that what is known as the longer Greek recension really contains thirteen letters. It may also be remarked that the editor here named Hartung is more commonly known as Paccus, his full name being Valentinus Hartung Frid, which in the customary way he Latinized into Paccus. By a misprint on the following page the edition of Voss is represented as published in the same year as Ussher's, whereas it appeared two years later.

But enough of such picking of holes. These little flaws do not enter into the substance of the work, which is throughout solid and well-wrought. It is freely and vividly written, and those who are best acquainted with the Fathers and their writings will know how much is implied when it is said that from the first page to the last Dr. Farrar's work is intensely interesting. He has entered with the fullest intelligence and with sensitive human sympathy into those early times, and has vitalized them. He has taken the Fathers out of the hands of scholars and theologians, and made them common property and companionable figures. Dr. Farrar has never used his great gifts and acquirements to better purpose than in dissipating the dreariness of that remote period of Church history, and in dispelling the mists in which a false and narrow ecclesiasticism has enveloped the Fathers. And it is matter of congratulation that this book, which most successfully popularizes their teaching, at the same time exposes the childishness of many views and usages which, because primitive, have gained currency. There can be no doubt that Dr. Farrar's volumes will find a response in many a candid mind. He has produced a book which will long be a standard work. It fills, and fills excellently, a serious gap in our literature. It will be widely read, and wherever it is read, it will not only give pleasure by its graphic pictures and eloquent passages, but will convey important information which it is most desirable that the public should know.

MARCUS DODS.
