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AN ONLINE QUOTE ATTRIBUTED TO ST. JEROME, ON PRAYER

It's often wise to be wary of online quotes which carry a famous name, but no reference. One of these caught my eye a couple of days ago, and I wondered if it was genuine. A google search revealed nothing as to its source, unfortunately. It does appear without reference in a Catholic collection of quotes from the saints.

Here it is:

“Let prayer arm us when we leave our homes. When we return from the streets let us pray before we sit down, nor give our miserable body rest until our soul is fed.” – St. Jerome

The quotation in this case is indeed authentic. The reference is St Jerome, Letter 22 to Eustochium (*de virginitate servanda / on the duties of a virgin*), chapter 37; taken from F.A.Wright (translator), *St Jerome: Select Letters*, Loeb Classical Library 262 (1933), p.144-5.

Letter 22 is a treatise, really, rather than a letter. It was composed around 384 AD. It was translated by W. H. Fremantle for the 19th century *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* series II, volume 6. This translation may be found online in many places, such as [here](#). Fremantle renders the Latin as follows:

When we leave the roof which shelters us, prayer should be our armor; and when we return from the street we should pray before we sit down, and not give the frail body rest until the soul is fed.

Yet another translation of letter 22 appears in P. Carroll, *The satirical letters of St. Jerome*, Chicago, 1956, on p.17-68.^[1] There are probably others. The most recent translation known to me is by Charles Christopher Mierow, *The Letters of St Jerome, vol. 1 (1-22)*, (1963), in the *Ancient Christian Writers* series, on p.134-80. But I have not seen any of these.

The Latin text was printed by Hilberg in *CSEL* 54, on pages 143-211, from which the Loeb text was supposedly drawn. The text of our quote is the same in both, and reads:

Egredientes hospitium armet oratio, regredientibus de platea oratio occurrat ante, quam sessio, nec prius corpusculum requiescat, quam anima pascatur.

Manuscripts are listed in Hilberg on p.143. The oldest is 6th century.

There is apparently a commentary on the letter: Neil Adkin, *Jerome on Virginity: A Commentary on the Libellus de virginitate servanda (Letter 22)*, ARCA Classical and

Medieval Texts, Papers and Monographs 42 (Cambridge: Francis Cairns, 2003).^[2]

The Loeb is out of copyright, and so may be found on Archive.org, or via [this site](#). Searching for it by Google is a depressing business, with a mass of bookseller results entirely concealing the download. I had to specify “PDF” in the search to locate the free copy. This made me notice how unfit a search engine Google now is. It’s not really oriented towards useful information, so much as commerce. Once it would easily have brought me material useful to me. Now it brings me material useful to the shareholders of Amazon and half-a-hundred other merchants. I had not originally known that it was online. I did consider buying a volume; a sheer waste of money. I did feel rather annoyed once I realised.

The Google search did produce two search results, which are on JSTOR. The first is a negative review of the Loeb volume by the great Alexander Souter, [here](#), which lists the defects and concludes with the words “It is abundantly clear that this book suffers from want of competence and of care”. The second is a truly vicious review by one Martin R. P. McGuire [here](#), ending with the words, “Professor Wright has shown himself incompetent to deal in a scholarly and accurate manner with a patristic writer. The editors of the Loeb must assume a certain amount of responsibility for not having investigated his qualifications thoroughly before assigning to him the letters of St. Jerome.”

The tone of the McGuire review is so intemperate that we must suppose some form of personal animosity. There is a Wikipedia article on McGuire that informs us that he was a Catholic University of America scholar.

But who was F. A. Wright? This is hard to say. He does not appear in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. His publications are mainly translations or deal with Greek poetry. I did find a short statement in a book on *Rationalist Criticism of Greek Tragedy*, by James E. Ford, p.56:

Frederick Adam Wright was professor of Greek at London University, but his real vocation was his commitment to liberal causes, one of which was women’s rights (“The fact is—and it is well to state it plainly—that the Greek world perished from one main cause, a low ideal of womanhood” [1]). He takes from Verrall the basic idea of the ironic dual message in Euripides’ plays and states his acceptance of Verrall’s interpretations of Iphigenia in Taurus, Heracles, Orestes, and the Bacchae (see 109, 111).^[3]

Other sources are vague. One website says: “Frederick Adam Wright (1869-1946) was Professor of Classics in the University of London.” The index of contributors in the “The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900, Volume 5”, p.[857](#), confirms his dates but says vaguely “headmaster, class. scholar”. One final source, that I was only able to access as a snippet, stated: “FREDERICK ADAM WRIGHT (1869-1946) Wright was Professor of Classics at Birkbeck College, London, and the author of numerous books on classical literature as well as of translations from Greek and Latin authors.”^[4]

Possibly Professor Wright and his critics may have been divided by political considerations here. But I would guess that the cause of all the problems identified by Souter is that the old man simply produced a translation by the slacker standards of the early Loeb volumes,

and left the rest to the Loeb editors; who let him down.

All the same, F. A. Wright gave expression to a thought of St Jerome that has achieved an independent existence. I expect St Jerome is pleased!

1. ^[1]ACW preface, p.20, currently visible online as preview [here](#).↵
 2. ^[2]I owe many of these details to the excellent Fourth Century website, and their page on Letter 22 [here](#).↵
 3. ^[3]Google Books preview [here](#).↵
 4. ^[4]Richard Stoneman, *Daphne into laurel: translations of classical poetry from Chaucer to the present*, 1982. The page number is unknown to me, but possible p.305.↵
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