

THE GREAT COUNCIL OF NICE.

Letters of Lucius Comnenus, Acolyth of Corduba, to P. Valerius Varro, Sub-Deacon of the same City; with Notes by a Country Parson.

LETTER I.

I have already given you, my beloved Varro, such a description of this elegant city of Nice, as my opportunities of observation have allowed me to furnish. To one whose life has been spent in so distant and rude a province of the empire as Spain, the beauty, wealth and splendor of these cities of the East seem almost like the imagery of some gorgeous dream.

I must say something, however, of my own pleasant lodging on the borders of the lake Ascanus. Imagine a broad, beautiful sheet of water, the shores of which are cultivated with the most laborious industry, directed by the taste for which the inhabitants of these provinces have always been celebrated.

But I must not detain you upon these matters of so trifling importance in comparison with the great object of my visit to this city. Every day, my dear Varro, witnesses the arrival of a throng of ecclesiastics, from every portion of the Catholic Church, brought together by the call of our most Christian Emperor, whom my God preserve!

Our munificent Emperor has provided most richly for the support and accommodation of this large body of the clergy during their attendance upon the Council. The stream of bounty which is flowing around us is worthy of the throne of the Caesars even in these its most glorious days.

At the same time, Athanasius has informed me that there are present in the city the pastors of three churches founded by the Apostles: Macarius, Bishop of Jerusalem; Eustathius, of Antioch, and his own Bishop Alexander, of Alexandria.

To-morrow, being the thirteenth of the kalends of July, is appointed for the solemn and public opening of this august assembly.

* From the Church Record. † Athanasius says that the number of Bishops in attendance at the Council of Nice was three hundred and eighteen.

Cathedral at Corduba. The walls are of polished marble, and the lofty dome and sculptured ceiling are supported by three ranges of columns, wrought after the most majestic order of Grecian architecture, the Doric.

But the presence of the messenger warns me to close this epistle. To-morrow, if it please God, my Varro, I will resume my stylus, and I trust that I shall be able to give you a satisfactory history of this august and holy council, and of the proceedings, manners and daily life of those who are here assembled.

This letter is sent to you by the hands of the first messenger of the road to Cneius Pamphilus, Vice-Prefect of Spain.

LETTER II.

I was obliged, my Varro, to conclude my last epistle in such haste, as prevented me from recalling to your mind a beautiful sentiment of St. Cyprian, of Carthage, over whose animated and fervid epistles to the Churches, we have so often lingered with delight in our pleasant study at Corduba.

As a proof of this, I have already mentioned the presence of Catholic Bishops from every country, united in one faith, and acknowledging one Divine head, as the centre of their unity, and the source of their authority.

Such, my Varro, is the glorious sentiment, which the rare beauty of the scene recalled to me this evening beside the waters of the Bithynian Ascanus.

Two hours have not yet elapsed since the departure of the messenger, and I am yet laboring at the pleasant toil of these letters. Since then, indeed, I have suffered a most delightful interruption, which has induced me to send another epistle so speedily upon the heels of the preceding, provided I can finish it by the dim light of the closing day, not much relieved by the lamp that swings in the portico.

The barges, in their construction and arrangements, are every way worthy of the taste and wealth of Messala, of whom, as you recollect, my lord Hosius has often spoken to us. They are constructed for five banks of oars, arranged in the quinqueux, allowing space for thirty oarsmen, without interfering with the freedom of each other, in their operations.

tions are such as to accord with the majesty of him, to whose service they are now devoted. The ample decks are covered with the richest Babylonian carpets, and overhung by canopies of purple silk, adorned with gems, and supported by slender columns and rings of gold.

The embarkation took place about an hour ago, and, as I write, I can discern the gleaming cross which surmounts the labarum in the distance, as if returning; and my ear can catch the faint melodies of the flutes, to which the oarsmen keep time—the notes occasionally overpowered by the stirring peal of the trumpet, to which the rocks and green hills beyond, echo joyously.

I. Mid the balmy close of day: While the twilight fades away; Ere the stars with trembling gleam Cast their image on the stream.

II. As we watch the evening light Softly melting into night, On the kindled lamp-light falls, Brightly on the chamber walls, Emblem faint of light divine, God to heaven, the praise be thine!

III. Thee in glories hymns we praise: Volcanic heart to thee we raise; Thou wilt hear our feeble hymn Bid the songs of Cherubim, Ever-ringing round thy throne, Great Jehovah, Thine in one.

IV. Bounteous Lord of heavenly light Shine upon our mortal night, Son of God! our soul's life-giver, From his death of sin deliver Us, thy children, while we sing, Praise to thee, eternal King!

How richly the sounds, mellowed by distance, swell over the blue waters, till the whole earth seems vocal with praise. The far and feeble echoes of the mountains, rendered more distant and more feeble as the barges advanced towards me, seem almost like spirit-voices answering in chorus.

They are here—the barges sweep gracefully to the shore, and during the few moments of preparation necessary to their embarkation, let me endeavor to give you some idea of the appearance of some of the principal personages of the group on the deck of the imperial barge.

Constantine harrisen from his seat, and stands gazing upon the band of the chosen fifty on the shore, whose military salute he has just returned. He bears in every feature the impress of greatness, for his person as well as his mind has been enriched by nature with her choicest endowments.

At her side is Crispus, the young and gallant Caesar, whom all hearts love, whom all lips praise. At once the friend and pupil of Lactantius, the most eloquent of the Christians, he seems to have profited most richly by the instructions of that good and great man.

At her side, seemingly forgetful of every thing but the standard which he bears, is the Caesar Licinius, the son of Constantia. His brow, to an observing eye, bears premature marks of care, and his eye is anxiously thoughtful in its expression.

I am summoned to the presence of the Bishop, who has just arrived within. Till to-morrow, then, my Varro, farewell!

* The reader may gain some idea of the vessels here alluded to from Plutarch, in Marc Anton.

† The labarum or sacred standard of Constantine, of which more hereafter.

‡ The author is aware that the above is a very feeble and a very liberal translation of the little hymn alluded to. Basil says, that it was a custom of the early Christians to return thanks to the three persons of the Godhead by hymns, when the lamps were lighted in the evening.

§ Licinius, the rival and the foe of Constantine, who had married Constantia, sister of the Emperor, was subdued and put to death in the previous year, A. D. 325.

stained the infant earth with a brother's blood. Who can contemplate the character of sin, and not tremble at the thought of giving it currency by example? Behold its contagion, extending even faster than the human race, rising into such awful profligacy, as in the forcible language of the prophet, to "grieve the Almighty at his heart" that he had created man.

The holiness of God. What an awful idea of the holiness of God have we in the death of Jesus! The vengeance of God was centred in the bosom of his Son: what an awful consideration this to the sinner, who is committing the worst of all suicides, the suicide of his immortal soul!

Reliance upon Providence. To make our reliance upon Providence both pious and rational, we should, in every great enterprise we take in hand, prepare all things, with that care, diligence and activity, as if there were no such thing as Providence for us to depend upon; and again, when we have done all this, we should as wholly and humbly rely upon it, as if we had made no such preparation at all.

The Jester. A common jester, one who is sent for to company to make sport, acts a part much below the character of a man, or a Christian: for jesting, though it may be an innocent diversion, can never be an honest employment; it will not bear being made a profession; and, therefore, when men make it their business, it must needs be an unlawful calling; and the jester will be exposed to the threatening of the text, to be called into judgment for every "idle word" he speaks.

Catechising. If you see Christ's Flock, do as Jacob did, that thriving shepherd, look well to your sheep when they are in conceiving. What colour and tincture you give them in that hint, you shall know them by for many years after. Never look that that man should profit at a sermon, whom you have never seasoned in the principles of Christianity.

Inconsistent Churchmen. It is almost as sad to see persons halting between two opinions, as to see them choosing at once the wrong one. How often may we hear men praying, in the morning, to be delivered from schism, that is, needless separation from the Church; and see them, in the evening, running into the very mischief from which they besought deliverance, hastening to a meeting-house, where schism is taught and practised.

The Garner. The very first son of these guilty parents [Adam and Eve] imbibed their sinful propensities. The principle on which his father acted, instigated Cain to that inhuman deed, which

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