

THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCH.

Of peculiar interest to 'Messenger' readers at this time is a sketch of the Patriarch of Armenia, which was sent to the Boston 'Congregationalist' by an American resident in Constantinople:—

There is one man in Constantinople, not often mentioned in the public press who is playing a mighty part in the life and death struggle between the Armenians and the Porte—Mattheos Ismirlian, patriarch of all Armenians in Turkey. If one crosses the Golden Horn into old Stamboul, and, passing through the ancient Hippodrome, descends towards the Marmora, he will find himself in the quarter known as Kum-Kapu and in the immediate vicinity of the Armenian patriarchate. The building is old and has nothing impressive in its outward appearance. If a visitor be provided with proper letters of introduction, he will be conducted with little formality into the presence of a man a trifle above medium height, thin, of dark complexion and clothed in the usual black gown. The face is strong, resolute, not handsome, scarcely sympathetic. It is an Armenian face with large features, the lower part massive, the nose large. A flowing beard, now turning gray, falls over the chest and nearly conceals the outline of the mouth. The lips are full, but not sensual, and close firmly together, indicating well the resolute character of the man. The eyes are large, dark, heavily lidded, and are arched over by heavy brows. The countenance altogether conveys the impression of melancholy and force.

The Armenian people are happy—if indeed the term 'happy' can be applied in any restricted sense to this unfortunate race—that the mantle of authority in this critical hour rests upon the shoulders of this man. Tennyson prayed:

Ah, God, for a man with heart, head, hand,
Like some of the simple great ones gone
Forever and ever by,
One still, strong man in a blatant land,
Whatever they call him, what care I?
Aristocrat, democrat, autocrat—one
Who can rule and dare not lie.

In Mattheos Ismirlian Tennyson's prayer has been granted word for word. If the present conflict results in the enfranchisement of the Armenians from the rule of their oppressors, Patriarch Mattheos will be recognized and remembered among the saviours of his people; if it fails, he will go down with his nation, sacrificed either to the revenge of the Turks or to the malice of disappointed revolutionists.

Mattheos Ismirlian is still a young man. He was born in 1845 in Kum-Kapu, the Armenian quarter of Constantinople, and there in the patriarch's church he was christened with the name of Simeon. He is of humble family, as is true of all the Armenian clergy. His grandfather was a tailor from Smyrna, and the name Ismirlian, or 'the man from Smyrna,' was assumed when the family came to Constantinople. Simeon's boyhood was passed in Kum-Kapu in attendance on the Armenian grammar schools. From early youth the religious temper of his mind was apparent, and when he was nineteen years old he was made deacon of the Armenian Church in the little village of Ortakeuy on the Bosphorus.

The Armenian like the Greek, clergy is divided into two classes—the parish priests, who are married and can never rise above this position, and the celibate clergy, to whom the highest offices in the church are open. To a young man entering the Church the alternative always presents itself—married life with the career of parish priest, or celibacy with the possibility of promotion. With young Ismirlian there was no hesitation. He entered the celibate clergy in 1869, when twenty-four years of age he was ordained as arch-priest and received the name of Mattheos. The next five years were busy, but not especially eventful. He

was elected successively secretary to the patriarch, member of the assembly and member of the synod. During these years no man in Constantinople was so indefatigable as preacher and teacher; no amount of official work was allowed to interfere with what he has always held to be the two prime duties of the servant of the Church—preaching and teaching. His preaching, as well as his public speaking, was remarkable for its simplicity, directness and intensity. No man who ever heard an address from his lips doubted the depth of conviction that lay behind every word. Naturally this kind of preaching, unfortunately far removed from what the people are wont to hear, produced a profound impression, and the preacher's reputation grew rapidly. At the same time he was becoming recognized at the patriarchate as a man of unusual soundness of judgment and purity of motive.

The reward of his services came in 1876, when he was ordained as bishop

with hopes of election strain every nerve to secure the prize. Bishop Mattheos, though prominent in all the councils of the Church, refused to make any effort to secure his election, and even declined to declare himself a candidate. Nevertheless, on the first vote of the assembly, he was among the four receiving the greatest number of votes, and, on a subsequent ballot, his name was one of two sent to the Tsar for appointment to the office of catholicos, for, by the constitution, the final appointment is made by the Czar from two names sent to him by the assembly.

Although Ismirlian's name was rejected by the Czar, it was felt from that time that he would be the next patriarch. The sentiment was justified when the great political and religious assembly of the Armenian people was summoned to meet in Constantinople in December, 1894, for the election of a new patriarch. From the first there was but one voice among the delegates. The question

ter requesting power to appoint new bishops in those places where, as in Moosh, the bishops had been in prison for periods of from one to three years. The minister immediately despatched a note in reply, saying that the statements about Moosh were false and demanding their withdrawal. The patriarch replied, 'The statements are true and the truth I cannot withhold.'

The government of the Sultan naturally regards the patriarch as its arch-enemy. The Turks demand a man who shall be subservient to them. They have found in Mattheos Ismirlian a man of indomitable courage who cannot be bribed, flattered or deceived. His first audience with the Sultan, on Jan. 11, filled Constantinople with amazement. Instead of offering to His Majesty the usual honeyed flattery of the Eastern court, this plain priest of a conquered people stood before the ruler, thanked him for the confirmation of his election and then said: 'As far as my conscience permits me I will obey you, but at the same time I must look to the welfare of my people.' Not a word of hypocrisy, not a syllable of flattery; not an intimation of prayers for the life and health of the sovereign! The Sultan in a rage ordered him to be sent away and omitted the customary decoration.

One other communication between these two men is worth recording. About one month after the last interview the Sultan again sent for the patriarch and offered him, as a decoration, the first class of the Osmani-yeh, the highest decoration that can be given to a civilian subject of the empire. 'Your Majesty,' was the reply, 'what have I to do with such things? I am a simple priest. I live on bread and olives, as do my people. I have no place in my house for such gorgeous things. I pray you do not ask me to accept it.' And so the royal bribe was rejected.

Personal courage, rising from a deep conviction of duty to his office, is a notable characteristic. In a city where no freedom of speech exists, he has made remarks in public that would have caused his death or removal at any other time. At the installation service in the great church, in the presence of his people, he mounted the pulpit, holding in his hand the constitution granted by Abdul-Aziz. Turning to the people, he said: 'Before God, and in presence of this meeting, I swear to remain faithful to my government and my nation, and to watch over the just and explicit fulfilment of this constitution. My understanding of the word "faithful" is this: faithfulness involves, on the side of the government, protection of life and property. Without this "faithfulness" on the side of the subject is hypocrisy.' The boldness of these words becomes apparent when we realize that the word 'constitution' is absolutely prohibited in Turkey, and if heard in the mouth of an Armenian means imprisonment and perhaps death; and with the memory of the Sassoun outrages fresh in every mind his definition of 'faithfulness' sounded like high treason.

The difficulties of his position are, it is sad to say, daily growing greater. On the one hand stands the government, seeking by every means to destroy him and his power; on the other stand the Huntschagists, rabid revolutionists, who hope to free Armenia by the knife. The patriarch, yearning with all his soul for the deliverance of his people, nevertheless sees, as every wise man must, the futility of the Huntschagist plans, and refuses to lend an ear to their counsels. Hence they declare that he has betrayed the cause, and they call for his life. Rarely has man been placed in harder position; never, I believe, has he borne his lot with more unflinching heroism, in simple consecration to duty. Every true friend of Armenia prays that this man's life may be spared to see a happier day for his race, and to be the patriarch, the father and ruler of a restored nation.



MATTHEOS ISMIRLIAN, The Armenian Patriarch.

by the Catholicos George IV., at Etchmiadzin. From that time his promotion from one position of authority to another was rapid. In 1886 he was made leader or director of the parish of Egypt, under the authority of the patriarch of Constantinople. The improvements that he instituted were numerous; the parish was cleared of debt, the churches and official buildings were re-furnished and repaired and assemblies were organized. The efficiency of his service in that country brought him the decoration of a golden cross from King Menelik of Abyssinia and the second class of the Medjidieh from the Sultan; and, what was much more cherished, the devotion of all the Armenians of Egypt. Failing health finally compelled him in 1891 to return to Constantinople. The following year brought Ismirlian a remarkable proof of the love of the nation. The death of the catholicos of Etchmiadzin necessitated a new election by the national assembly. Naturally the office of catholicos, the highest in the gift of the Armenian Church, is coveted by all men of ability, and the candidates who flatter themselves

of intense interest was, 'Will the Sultan confirm the election of a man of such known resoluteness and patriotism?' Great was the exultation among the deputies of the assembly when it was signified from the palace that the choice of Bishop Mattheos Ismirlian would be approved. Accordingly, in December, 1894, the election was completed and was immediately confirmed by the Sultan.

Since that time Patriarch Mattheos has been in a very real sense the champion of his people, bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows as few have done even in an office that has been filled by men of conspicuous consecration. If the hearts of all Christendom have been stirred by the stories of suffering that have come from Armenia, how much more have these stories wrung the heart of a man who feels that he has been called to be the leader and the father of this people! By every legal means in his power he has fought for the deliverance of his nation, despising death and the threats of imprisonment. About a month after his installation as patriarch he sent to Riza Pasha, the minister of justice, a let-