

THE GREAT COUNCIL OF NICE.

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

LETTER IV.

It wants yet an hour, my Varro, to the usual time for the public prayers, and I cannot employ it more to my own satisfaction than in giving you an account of what I have heard and seen since my last epistle was closed. I have spent an hour agreeably, in wandering about the city, and in re-visiting some of those places which are most interesting to strangers, and most worthy of repeated contemplation. The Forum, which owes its existence to the taste and munificence of Hadrian, is a noble structure, somewhat resembling that of Trajan at Rome. It is surrounded by a lofty quadrangular portico, and the principal entrance is like a triumphal arch, with columns of glittering marble from the quarries in the little island of Proconnesus. We may meet the monuments of this Emperor in almost every province in the empire, but those of the east seem to have been particularly favored. The forum of Nice, is advantageously situated on a rising ground in the heart of the city, into which the broad and even public way enters, and from which it diverges, reminding one how easy and rapid is the communication between the great heart of the empire at Rome, and the most distant realms that bow to her sceptre, or acknowledge the power of her arms. The forum was crowded when I arrived, with a multitude of persons, most of whom I ascertained to be strangers like myself. On the pedestal of the column, which has recently been erected here to celebrate the brilliant victory of Constantine and the Caesar Crispus over Licinius, stood a man of noble appearance, clad in the flowing garb of a heathen philosopher, vehemently disputing with the crowd concerning the claims of the Christian faith. Not far distant, leaning against one of the columns of the portico, was a young man, whose hollow cheek, burning eye, and extravagant gestures, caused me to mistake him for one of those unhappy persons whom God in his providence has deprived of the gift of reason. As I drew near, however, I soon found that he was reciting, in frigid and affected verse, the story of the Milvian bridge. No wonder that the effort to infuse the artificial fervor of rhetoric into such a barren and servile imitation of the poetry of the Augustan age, awoke my sympathies. Such verses might turn Apollo into marble. "And there," thought I—"yonder subtle logomachist—this gaunt weaver of limping hexameters, are the successors of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, of Horatius and Maro! and yet the philosopher is one of the ablest of his age, and the poet (pro pudor!) wears the laurel wreath." Truly, my Varro, compared with such, the Christians may glory in the profound learning of Eusebius, and the noble classic eloquence of Lactantius; and even the profane chant of the Thalia, may seem like a breathing from Helicon, contrasted with the strains of Herodes Felix. As both these persons enjoy the patronage of the Emperor, we may hear of them again, before the close of the Council. They represent pretty fairly I think, the merits of the heathen philosophy and literature, as it now exists in the empire. The genius of Longinus has ceased to shine upon the world; and of Porphyry I have no knowledge, except that his writings have been powerless, and that his voice is now silent forever. Felix may be said to surpass Calpurnius himself in frigid and extravagance. But enough of these.

In the Basilica of Aurelian, which communicates with the forum, on the eastern side, I saw deposited the cuirass of Miridates, one of the celebrated generals of Narses, slain by the hand of Galerius among the mountains of Armenia. At its side is a copy of the edict of Diocletian, forbidding in his dominions the practice or study of the occult arts of magic and alchemy. The juxtaposition, although of course entirely accidental, struck me as significant, when taken in connection with the circumstances of the times, and the characters of the men. The battered trophy of the prowess of the most fierce and blood-thirsty of men, and of persecutors, is no unworthy companion for the forerunner of those edicts, by which in his artful but dangerous policy, Diocletian warred first with the old superstitions, and then with the faith once delivered to the saints. Vacillating in respect to the good betwixt conscience and prudence, but rash in the sanction or the commission of the evil which others prompted, had Diocletian relied upon Diocletian, his might have been a better and a nobler life—had he possessed better advisers, the pangs of remorse in his feeble old age and in his miserable death might have been less severe. He had "sown the wind" (and a hot withering scorch of the desert it was!) did he not, in some fearful sense, justly "reap the whirlwind?" If ever Galerius at times, grew sick of carnage, though his black heart was fortified by the triple steel of hatred, superstition and false philosophy, think you that no spectres of remorse haunted the soul of the Emperor. All men wondered at the magnificence of that palace which he built for his retirement at Salona, to him it was but a splendid mockery, a very hall of the muses in appearance, but peopled with the furies, in reality. That this was so, we know—why it was so, none but an all-seeing and, perhaps, avenging God can tell; but what peace did he deserve to enjoy, who for policy or popularity—nay, worse, for the sake of freeing himself from the importunity of the blood-thirsty Cesar, consigned so many thousands of his subjects to death? His abdication of the empire was, in part at least, influenced by the thought, that in an evil hour, he had let loose the flood-gates of a persecution which his conscience could not sanction, and which when once in action he could not control. Miserable, most miserable man! Methinks I see him wandering like a spectre through the splendid chambers of that Dalmatian palace, vainly repining at the loss of his abused power, harassed with the apprehension of the evils which had come upon the empire, evils of whose beginnings he knew that he himself was not guiltless—wounded in spirit by the misfortunes of his wife and daughter, and the coldness of Constantine and Licinius, and haunted by other griefs which hastened his death, if indeed, they did not

prompt him to die, ignobly, by his own hand.* But Diocletian has gone to his God, and his God will judge him in righteousness. Let us turn from the dead to the living!

The most careless observer of the daily life of the inhabitants of these Eastern cities, must be convinced, that strictness of morals is no favorite virtue among a pagan people. The disgusting evidences of former licentiousness meet me at every turn—and among the multitudes here who yet cling to the service of the "Gods many and Lords many"—of the old superstition, it is displayed with a boldness which may well make a Christian shudder. Many of those degrading vices from which the pagans of the west and north are free, or which, if indulged there at all, are indulged secretly and sparingly, are here practised almost in open day, and with an unblushing front. Here Paganism displays its true aspect; and every day convinces me, not only that it has no moral power to restrain vice, but that it often furnishes the most powerful encouragements of vice. Among the monuments, yet swarming with life, of this old deceiver of the nations, there is every thing to assure the reflecting beholder, that great indeed was the "mystery of iniquity" which they upheld and sanctioned, which they still, though only by tolerance, uphold. The temple, though only by tolerance, uphold. The temple, though only by tolerance, uphold. The temple, though only by tolerance, uphold.

The devotee of Paganism, though enlightened in intellect, has been educated to resist the light, and to sin on, in opposition to his own moral convictions when awakened. And thus it is still. The ethics of the old and new systems, with a knowledge of which the common mind, at this day, is extensively imbued, are powerless, because they are in opposition to the cherished habits of vice, allowed and fostered by the popular religion. To minds besotted and darkened by evil influences like these, to hearts thus awfully depraved, there can be no restoring power, except it come from the spirit of the living God. But do not the Christians sometimes relapse into vice? That such relapse has been, and is, true—and so long as a man is a depraved being, and tried by temptation without, and by corruption within, such relapse must ever be. But there is a purifying energy in the gospel, which is deathless and divine—an energy which Paganism never knew, and never can know. They whose hearts have been renewed by the grace of God, may, indeed be, and often are, misled and seduced into sin, but these self-examination, the rebukes and prayers of the faithful, and the wholesome discipline of the church, may, in God's good time, reclaim. But what was there to reclaim the Pagan?—what could there be to purify the Pagan world, or to cleanse society from its festering corruptions? Nothing short of heavenly truth! Christianity can do it. The gospel will do it. The new Platonists may discourse eloquently of virtue, but their words reach no hearts. The philosophers and moralists themselves are sunk in the same mire, from which they profess to be able to rescue their disciples. The inspired pen of an apostle, has drawn once for all, a picture of their vices, which is applicable now everywhere, which will be applicable, through all time, to all who are in subjection to the god of this world, in whatever guise of false religion he may see fit to clothe himself. What Paul wrote to the Romans, I might write to you, but let that fearful picture suffice. It behoves us, my Varro, fervently to pray, that the links of this dreadful coalition of unbelief, error, pride, blood-thirstiness, superstition and lust, may be speedily broken, never again to be united, and that a "new heart and new spirit" may be given to this deluded race.

The shadow upon the dial reminds me, that the third hour of the day is approaching, and calls me to the necessary preparations for the public prayers. In these services, my Varro, though widely separated from each other, we may unite in spirit, in the blessed communion of the saints. How sweet to the Christian, to feel that this privilege is his. Although by providence or accident, cut off from the visible and public ministrations of the church—though business or necessity keep him at any time from the house of the Lord, his spirit will be there. The spirit of the sick man on his couch of pain, may mingle its adorations, its confessions and prayers, with those that are rising from the hearts and voices of the brotherhood of faith. The way-farer, on his journey, remembers that it is the hour of prayer, and chastens his thoughts to reverence and devotion as if in his own loved sanctuary. The voyager on the deep, as the hour comes, looks up to the blue vault of heaven, and silently beneath that great and glorious temple-dome, communes in heart with the Church of God everywhere under the sky. Farewell!

THE EASTERN CHURCHES.

(From the London Ecclesiastical Gazette for January.)

The following portions of a letter from Mr. Rassam, her Majesty's consul at Mossoul, addressed to the Rev. G. Tomlinson, were read to the Meeting:—

"Mossoul, April 20, 1841. "After a long and tedious journey of nearly three months, we at length arrived at our station on the 13th of February. I have not been able to write to you before on account of the confused state we were in for some time, but I hope to write, and also hear from you, more frequently.

"When I was last at Constantinople, the Nestorian Patriarch sent me a letter, expressing a great desire to know what had been done for them in regard to education; but, unfortunately, this letter fell into the hands of a Popish Bishop, who is now at Baghdad, but I will certainly try to obtain it for him.

"Only two days ago I received a letter from the Archbishop of the Nestorians, sent by a priest, in which he wishes to know whether they may expect any help from the English Church. Some offers have already been made them by Rome, but till now they have remained firm in their principles; but how long this may be the case it is not easy to say, especially if any assistance is offered, in order to protect them from the Kurds, who oppress them very much, they being subject to them.

"Have you been able to accomplish any thing for the good of this people? I hope you have, for it is sad indeed to see the distracted state of the Chaldean and Syrian Church here in Mossoul. Nothing but constant dissensions among them; several have left the churches on account of the abuses that are daily creeping in. Much, very much, might now be done, and I sincerely hope that some person will be sent out to them."

Two letters, addressed by the Rev. H. Southgate, delegate of the American Episcopal Church at Constantinople, to the Rev. G. Tomlinson, were also read. The following are extracts:

"Constantinople, Sept. 7, 1841.

"I left on the 7th of May for a tour in Mesopotamia, from which I have just now returned. In the course of my travels I visited Mossoul, and spent ten days with the consul, Mr. Rassam. My business was among the Syrians, but I gained from him and others considerable information respecting the Chaldeans, and had some intercourse with them directly. I found those of Mossoul in a very interesting state, divided into three parties, which may be classed as thorough Papists, moderate Papists, and anti-Papists. The first go all lengths in their subjection to the Pope; the second acknowledge his supremacy, but oppose the superstitions which it has been the policy of Rome to introduce into the Chaldean Church; the third have set their faces against him, and desire the deliverance of their Church from his control. Some of those, however, most devoted to the Papal interests, lament the interruption of the regular succession of the Patriarchate, which in former times descended from uncle to nephew (the Patriarchs themselves not being allowed to marry), but on the decease of the last Patriarch was conferred, by a legate from Rome, on a stranger, a Chaldean of Persia, educated at Rome. The regular successor resides at Al Kosh, nine hours from the city, and persists in claiming the Patriarchal seat. Their desire is, that the rightful successor should enter upon the Patriarchal office, at the head of those who favour his claim, or desire the rescue of the Church from the yoke of Rome; that the independence of the Church should be declared, and, if possible, protection obtained from England. The last object secured, there can be no doubt of the success of all the rest. If the Chaldeans, under the true Patriarch, could appeal in need to British aid, as the papal party look to France, there can be no reasonable doubt of the speedy and entire restoration of the Church. There is one other thing necessary, but not from government. The English Church should have a part in the work. There ought to be one or two English clergymen on the ground, to regulate the movement. Men they should be of fearless spirit, of thorough Catholic principle, of conciliating temper, and of great practical wisdom. Would that you or some sister Society could send such men to the field! The moment is a critical one, the need is imperative.

"While I was at Mossoul, communication between that city and the Nestorian Patriarch of the mountains was interrupted by a quarrel between the Nestorians and a tribe residing to the south. How long the difficulty may continue, it is impossible to say. The country of the Patriarch is perhaps accessible from the north, that is, from Van or Ourmia, as Dr. Grant has lately gone that way. He is of the American Congregational Missionary Society. Two clergymen from the same Society were on their way from Beyrout to Mossoul, while I was coming from the latter city to Mardin. I passed them on the desert of Sinjar, but as our routes were several miles distant from each other, we did not meet. One of them died soon after in the desert. The other is doubtless at Mossoul, with his wife, where he will wait for an opportunity of joining Dr. Grant in the mountains. At Mossoul the labours of dissenting clergymen must, I believe, be in vain. None but a representative of an Episcopal Church can accomplish the work to be done among the Chaldeans, who are, you know, all attached to the Papal Church. Permit me, my dear Sir, to urge upon your Society the necessity of immediate action. The people of Mossoul inquired with anxious interest when an English clergyman was to come among them. There is now a Nestorian bishop from Ourmia in this city. He has come with Mr. Perkins, one of the missionaries at Ourmia, who is now on a visit here, and may, perhaps, take the Bishop with him to the United States. The Bishop has in some way heard of our churches, and appears extremely desirous to learn more concerning them. He says, "We want Episcopal missionaries to come among us."

"He at once recognised in the Episcopacy a bond of Catholic union between us; and the interest he feels in hearing about the Reformed Episcopal Churches of the West shows how cordially clergymen from them would be received among the Nestorians.

"My own work, as I have said, was among the Syrians or Jacobites. My object in going among them was to establish a correspondence between their Church and our own, to explain to their Patriarch and Metropolitan the character and institutions of our western branches of the Church Catholic, and to offer the aid of the American Church in the education and improvement of the people. I spent two weeks with the Patriarch at Marcin, and ten days at Mossoul. I was every where received with the utmost cordiality, and my plans for the benefit of the Syrians hailed with the greatest delight. My principal proposition with regard to aid from the American Church, was that clergymen should come, not as missionaries, but as delegates; that they should establish a seminary of a high order at Mossoul, for the instruction of youth selected for the purpose, who, after receiving a thorough education, should be sent throughout the nation to establish schools and become teachers; that a press should be introduced, first, for the purpose of rescuing the old Syrian literature from destruction; and secondly, to provide the means of instruction in the different departments of knowledge common among us, but yet unknown to the Syrians; and, finally, that all these operations should be under the immediate supervision of the Metropolitan of Mossoul. The Patriarch at once acceded to the proposition, and I hope ere long it will be carried into effect. Another part of the plan is to have a theological seminary in the monastery where the Patriarch resides—the teachers to be Syrians, and the text-books selected from their own ancient literature. It will be necessary to add some books, such as Church Histories, &c.; but, whether translations or original works, every thing of this kind, as well as the text-books for the seminary and schools, will be submitted to the Patriarch, before being put to press. In explaining the character of our Churches, I made great use of your Arabic translation of the Liturgy, and presented copies to the Patriarch and to the Metropolitan of Mossoul. I put it also into the hands of others of the clergy, and was rejoiced to find it a most effectual means of correcting numerous misapprehensions received from the Papists, and imparting readily the very information which it was my object to convey."

"This is a great latitude of expression. There are dissenting Teachers, but no dissenting Clergymen: it is a contradiction of terms. Bishop Yohanna (see our last number) has since visited the United States.

"There are several matters of uncommon interest in the present state of the Eastern Churches, upon which I had neither time nor room to touch in my last of the 7th inst., but of which you may be glad to be informed. I take great pleasure in making these communications, and the more so from the strong desire that I have that the Churches of England and America, or at least those who are directly engaged in carrying on the intercourse with the Oriental Christians, should well understand each other's principles of action, and so address themselves to these Churches, that our several works, our designs, and our motives, should appear in harmony before the eyes of our Eastern brethren. For this purpose it seems desirable that active correspondence should be established between us. I shall always be glad to furnish information on ecclesiastical subjects, when I have it, either to yourself or to any others (as I know there are many), who are specially interested in the Eastern Churches, and shall be grateful in return for any suggestions that may be of service to us. I acknowledge myself indebted already for many useful hints which I have met with in English publications; especially in Mr. Beaven's pamphlet on intercourse with the Oriental Churches. Some of his statements, perhaps, he would modify considerably, if he were to visit and reside for a time in the East. But the great principles which he lays down are the sound and true ones, and the only principles upon which real permanent good can be done to the Eastern Churches.

"The principal event of importance which has occurred in this city during my absence, is the change of the Patriarch. He with whom you conferred is now a simple metropolitan. . . . You will see from these frequent changes of the Patriarchs how little dependence is to be placed on the favourable or unfavourable disposition of any one of them. I believe that I informed you in my last letter of the deposition of the Armenian Patriarch. His successor has not been in office a year, and every day we expect to hear of his fall. A very important change has lately taken place in the internal polity of the Armenian Church. Formerly its affairs were under the direction of twelve of the principal bankers, who managed every thing as they pleased, governed the Patriarch (whom by their influence at the Porte they set up or put down at pleasure), and were styled, significantly enough, the Nation. Lately the people, who are ever complaining of the bankers, have risen against their authority, and determined to have a fair representation of themselves in the direction of affairs. They have therefore substituted for the bankers a board, consisting of one from each trade and profession. Of course there is one banker among the rest, and there are twenty-four in all. When shall we have your Armenian translation of the Liturgy? I have no doubt it will be an instrument of great good. I know by trial that there is no way of introducing our Western Churches to our Eastern brethren like the translation of the Liturgy. I remember, among many others, an incident at Mossoul. I put a copy of your Arabic translation into the hands of a Syrian deacon, one of the best-informed and most influential men in the city. He glanced at it for a few minutes, and then said, 'It is not true then, as we have heard, that in England they have the communion only once in thirty years, and that then every body present rushes forward, and seizes a portion of the sacred elements for himself.' There are hundreds of such stories afloat. The Papists circulate them every where with the greatest diligence. The Liturgy, wherever it goes, contradicts them: it is a witness which cannot be gainsaid. The more I see of the Eastern Churches, the more deeply I am convinced that an union between them and us is practicable, without any sacrifice of Catholic principle. . . . In the matter of Communion, we must hold that to be the belief of the Church which we find in its standards. If the practice has become corrupt, let us hope that it will be improved with the increase of knowledge, the circulation of the Word of God, and the publication of the Fathers and Canons of the Church. In this good work lies our department of labour. I hail the entrance of your Society upon it as the dawn of a better day.

"September 23.—Three Armenians called yesterday to inquire whether it was true, as reported among their people, that an English delegate had arrived for the purpose of carrying into effect the protection of the Non-Papal Christians. They say, that there are many among their people, who, fearing lest some evil befall them in the present disturbed state of their Church, think and talk of taking refuge among the Papists, if no interposition comes from England. I believe that the mediation of your ambassador would easily settle the quarrel which now threatens to rend asunder the Armenian Church. The project of British protection, wherever it has been suggested to Eastern Christians, has created a deep sensation of joy, gratitude, and hope."

The Secretary then read the following recommendation from the Standing Committee:—"The Standing Committee beg to report to the Board, that they have taken into consideration the subjects connected with the expedition to Kurdistan, together with some recent communications respecting the state of religion in that and the neighbouring countries; and they beg to recommend, that the sum of Five Hundred pounds be placed at the disposal of His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Lord Bishop of London, for the purpose of promoting the objects of the Society in Chaldea and Kurdistan."

"Constantinople, Sept. 17, 1841. "There are several matters of uncommon interest in the present state of the Eastern Churches, upon which I had neither time nor room to touch in my last of the 7th inst., but of which you may be glad to be informed. I take great pleasure in making these communications, and the more so from the strong desire that I have that the Churches of England and America, or at least those who are directly engaged in carrying on the intercourse with the Oriental Christians, should well understand each other's principles of action, and so address themselves to these Churches, that our several works, our designs, and our motives, should appear in harmony before the eyes of our Eastern brethren. For this purpose it seems desirable that active correspondence should be established between us. I shall always be glad to furnish information on ecclesiastical subjects, when I have it, either to yourself or to any others (as I know there are many), who are specially interested in the Eastern Churches, and shall be grateful in return for any suggestions that may be of service to us. I acknowledge myself indebted already for many useful hints which I have met with in English publications; especially in Mr. Beaven's pamphlet on intercourse with the Oriental Churches. Some of his statements, perhaps, he would modify considerably, if he were to visit and reside for a time in the East. But the great principles which he lays down are the sound and true ones, and the only principles upon which real permanent good can be done to the Eastern Churches.

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"Constantinople, Sept. 17, 1841. "There are several matters of uncommon interest in the present state of the Eastern Churches, upon which I had neither time nor room to touch in my last of the 7th inst., but of which you may be glad to be informed. I take great pleasure in making these communications, and the more so from the strong desire that I have that the Churches of England and America, or at least those who are directly engaged in carrying on the intercourse with the Oriental Christians, should well understand each other's principles of action, and so address themselves to these Churches, that our several works, our designs, and our motives, should appear in harmony before the eyes of our Eastern brethren. For this purpose it seems desirable that active correspondence should be established between us. I shall always be glad to furnish information on ecclesiastical subjects, when I have it, either to yourself or to any others (as I know there are many), who are specially interested in the Eastern Churches, and shall be grateful in return for any suggestions that may be of service to us. I acknowledge myself indebted already for many useful hints which I have met with in English publications; especially in Mr. Beaven's pamphlet on intercourse with the Oriental Churches. Some of his statements, perhaps, he would modify considerably, if he were to visit and reside for a time in the East. But the great principles which he lays down are the sound and true ones, and the only principles upon which real permanent good can be done to the Eastern Churches.

"The principal event of importance which has occurred in this city during my absence, is the change of the Patriarch. He with whom you conferred is now a simple metropolitan. . . . You will see from these frequent changes of the Patriarchs how little dependence is to be placed on the favourable or unfavourable disposition of any one of them. I believe that I informed you in my last letter of the deposition of the Armenian Patriarch. His successor has not been in office a year, and every day we expect to hear of his fall. A very important change has lately taken place in the internal polity of the Armenian Church. Formerly its affairs were under the direction of twelve of the principal bankers, who managed every thing as they pleased, governed the Patriarch (whom by their influence at the Porte they set up or put down at pleasure), and were styled, significantly enough, the Nation. Lately the people, who are ever complaining of the bankers, have risen against their authority, and determined to have a fair representation of themselves in the direction of affairs. They have therefore substituted for the bankers a board, consisting of one from each trade and profession. Of course there is one banker among the rest, and there are twenty-four in all. When shall we have your Armenian translation of the Liturgy? I have no doubt it will be an instrument of great good. I know by trial that there is no way of introducing our Western Churches to our Eastern brethren like the translation of the Liturgy. I remember, among many others, an incident at Mossoul. I put a copy of your Arabic translation into the hands of a Syrian deacon, one of the best-informed and most influential men in the city. He glanced at it for a few minutes, and then said, 'It is not true then, as we have heard, that in England they have the communion only once in thirty years, and that then every body present rushes forward, and seizes a portion of the sacred elements for himself.' There are hundreds of such stories afloat. The Papists circulate them every where with the greatest diligence. The Liturgy, wherever it goes, contradicts them: it is a witness which cannot be gainsaid. The more I see of the Eastern Churches, the more deeply I am convinced that an union between them and us is practicable, without any sacrifice of Catholic principle. . . . In the matter of Communion, we must hold that to be the belief of the Church which we find in its standards. If the practice has become corrupt, let us hope that it will be improved with the increase of knowledge, the circulation of the Word of God, and the publication of the Fathers and Canons of the Church. In this good work lies our department of labour. I hail the entrance of your Society upon it as the dawn of a better day.

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