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BASIL OF CÆSAREIA.

THE latest volume in the "Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,"[1] brings prominently before us one who was probably the most vigorous, striking, and manly figure in the Church of Asia Minor under the empire of Constantinople, though some blemishes of temper and of pride have combined with a certain hardness and want of sympathy in his nature to render him an object of less interest in history than he deserves. Mr. Jackson's translation is at once pleasant to read as English, and true to the letter and to the spirit of the original; and we may hope that it will succeed (as it deserves) in drawing more attention on the part of classical scholars to the varied interest of the Christian writers of the period in question. The voluminous writings of the three contemporary Cappadocians, Basil and the two Gregories, apart from the purely theological and ecclesiastical interest, possess a high value as storing up many facts about the state of society and of education, about the administration and law of the late Roman Empire as practically affecting the people, about the taxpayers' views on taxation, the travellers' views as to the roads and the seasons, the householders' views on the safety of his property, the merchants' and the investors' views on the public credit and the standard of commercial honesty; in short, about the ordinary life of a highly organized community, in which the oriental style of society and manners was being replaced by the European; and, above all, they show us the views entertained by three men of power and education as to the duties of the Church in its relation to all these various interests. A study of the three great Cappadocians

[1] St. Basil: *Letters and Select Works* (treatise "de Spiritu Sancto" and the nine Homilies of the Hexaemeron), translated with notes and prolegomena by the Rev. Blomfield Jackson, M.A.

from this point of view would make a most instructive and interesting work.

In Mr. Jackson's *prolegomena* we have a careful account of the life of Basil, and a very full account of the works which are not translated here. In the biography, the results of earlier writers, Tillemont and Maran (the Benedictine editor), are worked up; and there is added to them a much more precise localization of the scenes, in which recent geographical discoveries are utilized. Naturally, however, the biography is secondary to the translation; and there is still need for a careful study of the life of Basil and for a more exact determination of the dates of his letters as well as of the larger works. Several interesting incidents in his history seem to me not to have been properly understood; and the dates assigned to some letters by the Benedictine editor (and accepted by Mr. Jackson) are in several cases not convincing and even quite unsatisfactory.[1] While we cannot enter on any such wider questions within our narrow limits, we may profitably devote the pages of this article to studying, under the guidance of Mr. Jackson, a few passages which bring out some personal characteristics of "St. Basil the Great"; and, at the same time, the quotations will exemplify the spirit and excellence of the translation in this volume.

The letter which faced me, as I first opened the volume, No. 135, may be taken as a specimen, selected at random, of the translation and of Basil's expression. Basil acknowledges two books which Diodorus, presbyter of Antioch (afterwards bishop of Tarsus), had sent him for perusal. "With the second," he says, "I was delighted, not only with its brevity . . . but because it is at once full of thought and so arranged that the objections of opponents and the answers to them stand out distinctly . . . The

[1] The biography of Basil in *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, meritorious and useful as it is, is too much guided by the earlier modern authorities.

former work, which has practically the same force, but is much more elaborately adorned with rich diction, many figures, and niceties of dialogue, seems to me to require considerable time to read and much mental labour, both to gather its meaning and retain it in the memory. The abuse of our opponents and the support of our own side, which are thrown in, although they may seem to add some charms of dialectic to the treatise, do yet break the continuity of the thought and weaken the strength of the argument by causing interruption and delay . . . If the subject of the dialogue be wide and general, digressions against persons interrupt its continuity and tend to no good end. . . . So much I have written to prove that you did not send your work to a flatterer . . . I have, however, now sent back the larger and earlier of the two volumes, after perusing it as far as I have been able.[1] The second I have retained with the wish to transcribe it, but hitherto without finding any quick writer."[2]

This letter conveys a very favourable impression (and a correct impression) of Basil's tone to his friends, and to those who thought like himself: it is judicious in its criticism, pointed and simple in expression, polite and kindly in tone; it advises without assumption, and encourages without flattering.

Everywhere the warmth of Basil's affection for friends and relatives, and the pleasant recollection of old associations, combined with his good sense and lofty tone, convey a most favourable impression. Take a few examples: "One would rather see his friend, though angry with him, than anybody else, flattering him. Do not, then, cease

[1] The effect of this rather suggestive statement is toned down in the original by a sentence here omitted about Basil's weak health.

[2] This shows a rather low standard of the book-trade in Cæsarea, one of the greatest commercial cities of the East. Without such scribes, the publication of an edition of a book was impossible. A similar statement is made by Gregory Nyss. *Ep.* 15 (Migne).

preferring charges like the last! The very charge will mean a letter; and nothing can be more precious or delightful to me" (*Ep.* 21). Or this: "Now for my sins, I have lost my mother, the only comfort I had in life. Do not smile if, old as I am, I lament my orphanhood. Forgive me if I cannot endure separation from a soul, to compare with whom I see nothing in the future that lies before me. So once more my complaints have come back to me; once more I am confined to my bed, tossing about in my weakness, and every hour all but looking for the end of life" (*Ep.* 30). Or again, these recollections of childhood from *Ep.* 271: "To travel once again in memory to our young days, and to be reminded of old times, when for both of us there was one home, one hearth, the same schoolmaster, the same leisure, the same work, the same treats, the same hardships, and everything shared in common! What do you think I would not have given to recall all this by actually meeting you, to rid me of the heavy weight of my old age, and to seem to be turned from an old man into a lad again!"

But it was not pleasant to be on the opposite side from Basil. Speaking of the Arians, he is hardly to be trusted even as to facts. He felt too bitterly; and he exaggerated so rhetorically, that his words cannot be taken literally. Thus in *Ep.* 242 he declares that in the thirteen years of Arian persecution "the Churches have suffered more tribulations than all those that are on record since Christ's gospel was first preached"—an utterly unjustifiable statement (against which Mr. Jackson rightly, perhaps too mildly, protests, as "not to be taken literally"). The harsh and rude invective which Basil uses about his opponents is the fault of his age, and, while we regret it, we cannot wonder at it.

Difficult, however, as it is to appreciate the real character of the Arian controversy as a question of social life, on

the whole we gather, I think, that the progressive tendencies were on the side of Basil, and acquiescence in the existing standard of morality characterized the Arian point of view. The "Orthodox" Church was still the champion of higher aspirations, and Basil, however harsh he was to all who differed from him, was an ennobling and upward-struggling force in the life of his time. At a later period the facts changed; and, in the Iconoclast period, the sympathy of the modern student must, I think, be almost wholly against the successors of Basil, and in favour of the maligned and despised heretics.

The contest in which Basil was involved against the imperial power in regard to the division of Cappadocia into two provinces produced the most striking scenes of his life, and displayed both his strongest qualities and his worst faults of character. The questions at issue in this contest seem not to have been correctly apprehended by writers on the life of Basil. The policy of the Byzantine rule had been uniformly directed to subdividing the great provinces, and thus diminishing the power of provincial governors. Subdivision was the natural result of the centralization of authority, the exaggeration of the power of the court, and the diminishing of the power of officials at a distance from the court. Cappadocia was by far the largest of the provinces; its turn had now come to be subdivided, and in 371 the Emperor Valens resolved on this step. He may probably have been roused to it by the fact that the influence of Cæsareia, under its vigorous and uncompromising "orthodox" bishop, was dead against his ecclesiastical policy. It was natural that he should wish to diminish that influence; but in itself the subdivision would naturally have been soon made even by an orthodox emperor; and at a later time Justinian divided Cappadocia into three parts. The bias of Valens was shown, however, by his leaving the smaller part of Cappadocia to the metropolis Cæsareia, and

making the new province of Secunda Cappadocia decidedly larger. The officials who lived at Cæsareia, and the business which came to it, were much diminished, as the province of which it was the metropolis shrank to less than half its former size. The city, naturally, regarded the change with dismay, and protested strongly. Basil exerted himself to the utmost; but the three letters which he wrote intreating the intercession of certain influential persons with Valens in favour of Cæsareia, are among the poorest in the collection.[1] They are inflated and exaggerated in their description of the loss that would result to Cæsareia; they show no appreciation either on the one hand of the real causes that recommended the subdivision, or on the other of the weighty reasons that might have been urged against the centralizing policy. In fact the whole system of the orthodox Church was in favour of centralization; and Basil himself would have been the most vigorous supporter of that policy in any case where it did not affect his own city and his own archbishopric. He could not argue on strong grounds against the change, for his whole system of thought debarred him from those grounds, and his protests are weak and hysterical.

The true greatness of Basil, however, shone forth immediately afterwards, when Valens came to Cæsareia. The archbishop triumphantly resisted the efforts made by the creatures of Valens to overawe him, and bend him to the will of the Arian emperor. Valens himself was not blind to the nobility and dignity of Basil's character; he left the archbishop in secure possession of his rank and the freedom

[1] *Epp.* 74, 75, 76. The first is addressed to Martinianus, who had some personal friendship with Basil; otherwise he is unknown, but he evidently was not a Cappadocian official. The profusion of literary allusions in the letter, and the compliments to the knowledge of history and of mankind that Martinianus possessed, suggest that he was a philosopher or man of letters. He evidently lived at some distance both from Constantinople and from Cappadocia. Mr. Jackson's statement that he was an official of Cappadocia rests on no ancient authority, and seems to me not to suit the letter.

of his opinions; he attended divine service performed by him in the cathedral; he held private conference with him; and he gave land[1] to endow Basil's new foundation, the hospital, etc., near Cæsareia. Considering how bitter was the quarrel at this time between the Arian and the orthodox party, Valens deserves more credit in this case than he has generally received. But, as to Basil, every one must say, with Mr. Jackson, that "his attitude seems to have been dignified without personal haughtiness, and to have shown sparks of that quiet humour which is rarely exhibited in great emergencies except by men who are conscious of right and careless of consequences to self."

But, in the following months, the quarrel with Anthimus, bishop of Tyana, the metropolis of the new province of Cappadocia Secunda, shows Basil at his worst. He struggled to maintain his former rights over the churches and monasteries of the new province with undignified pertinacity. He created new bishoprics, not on account of the needs of the Church, but to increase the number of his supporters and their weight; and his old friend Gregory of Nazianzos could hardly forget or forgive the way in which Basil used him for his own purposes by almost forcing him to become bishop of Sasima, one of these new sees. He went in person to collect the revenues of St. Orestes (what Gregory calls sarcastically his "supply of sucking-pigs and poultry from St. Orestes"), and his servants came almost to a battle with those of his rival. Basil certainly would have justified his action in the same terms that Innocent, bishop of Rome, used shortly afterwards, about 408, that it was not right that the Church of God should be altered to suit the changes of this world.[2] But every attempt made to maintain that principle, fine as

[1] Mr. Jackson's suggestion that they were part of the imperial estate of Macellum, beside Cæsareia, is very probable.

[2] See my *Historical Geography of Asia Minor*, p. 93.

it seems in words, was a failure under the Empire, and must be a failure. The classification of dioceses was not of the essence of the Church; it naturally and properly varied with the changes of society, and prosperity, and political arrangement. The reason why Cæsareia had been an ecclesiastical centre lay originally in its being the political capital, and therefore the natural centre from which the province could best be affected and its churches directed. But, when Tyana had become the metropolis of considerable part of Cappadocia, it was merely introducing confusion to maintain that the cities of that province should look to Cæsareia ecclesiastically, and to Tyana in political, legal, and social respects. Neither Anthimus nor Basil showed in this case true dignity, or self-respect, or the respect due to a colleague; but, while no one cares about Anthimus, it is painful to those who respect and admire a great man to read about Basil's action, and above all to see his condemnation in the estrangement of his old friend Gregory, his supporter at first in the case.

Many touches of the raillery which became rude and unpleasant towards his opponents,[1] appear in a much more pleasant style when he writes to his friends.

He has found out that "there does seem something thinner than I was—I am thinner than ever."

In *Ep.* 4 he acknowledges a gift under the guise of a complaint that the giver is "evicting from our retreat my dear friend and nurse of philosophy, Poverty."

Twitting Gregory with the shortness of his letters, he says, "The letter is shown to be yours, not so much by the writing as by the style of the communication: in few words much is expressed."

The tone of these quotations doubtless gives the key to explain the rather enigmatic *Ep.* 1, where he speaks as if

[1] As when (*Ep.* 231) he calls one (perhaps Demosthenes, the agent of Valens) "the fat sea-monster" and "the old muleteer."

his travels through Syria and Egypt had been undertaken for the single purpose of meeting Eustathius, the philosopher, to whom the letter is addressed.

In *Ep.* 56, apologising for leaving a letter unanswered until his correspondent wrote again, he says, "I naturally forget very easily, and I have had lately many things to do, and so my natural infirmity is increased. I have no doubt, therefore, that you wrote to me, although I have no recollection of having received any letter from your excellency. . . . Really this letter of mine, as it is more than twice as bulky (as yours), will fulfil a double purpose. You see to what sophisms my idleness [surely laziness] drives me. . . . But, my dear sir, do not in a few words bring serious charges, indeed the most serious of all. Forgetfulness of one's friends, and neglect of them arising from high place, are faults which involve every kind of wrong. . . . I shall begin to forget you when I cease to know myself. Never, then, think that, because a man is a very busy man he is a man of faulty character."

The dignity, mingled with humility and desire for peace, shown in the two letters to his uncle Gregory, 59, 60, may be referred to as illustrating the graver and loftier side of his character.

As examples of the sound and high judgment, which placed him on the right side in most great social questions, we may quote the following. He writes to a physician, "In my opinion, to put your science at the head and front of life's pursuits is to decide reasonably and rightly" (*Ep.* 189).

He refers in *Ep.* 191 with longing admiration to the hospitable intercourse which "was once the boast of the Church. Brothers from each Church, travelling from one end of the world to the other, were provided with little tokens, and found all men fathers and brothers. But now," he says, "we are confined each in his own city, and every one looks at his neighbour with distrust."

In *Ep.* 73 he uses the whole influence of his position and of the Church to save some slaves from harsh punishment at the hands of Callisthenes, a government official [1] to whom they had behaved rudely. "Though you have sworn to deliver them to execution as the law enjoins, my rebuke is still of no less value, nor is the Divine law of less account than the laws current in the world." This episode would reward longer study than can here be given to it.

Basil's tone in addressing women lacks the charming ease that generally characterizes his letters to his male correspondents. An illustration is supplied in the two letters which he addressed to Nectarius, a noble of Cilicia, and his wife, on the death of their only son. The letter to Nectarius (No. 5), in spite of the rhetorical touch, "if all the streams run tears, they will not adequately weep our woe," is very fine, and the conclusion is charming, "Let us wait a little while, and we shall be once more with him. The time of our separation is not long, for in this life we are all like travellers on a journey, hastening on to the same shelter"; and so on in terms that have now become, through familiarity and repetition, less impressive than they were to Basil's contemporaries. But the letter to the bereaved mother is far inferior. "Alas, for the mighty mischief that the contact with an evil demon was able to wreak. Earth! what a calamity thou hast been compelled to sustain! If the sun had any feeling, one would think he might have shuddered," etc. After these bombastic commonplaces of rhetoric, he addresses the bereaved mother in almost equally frigid consolations. "When first you were made a mother, . . . you knew that, a mortal yourself, you had given birth to a mortal. What is there astonishing in the death of a mortal? . . . Look round at all the world in which you live; remember that every-

[1] He is shown to be an official by his having the power to send a soldier to Cæsareia with a message on the subject.

thing you see is mortal, and all subject to corruption. Look up to heaven, even it shall be dissolved; look at the sun, not even the sun will last for ever. All the stars together," etc., etc., "are subject to decay." In the early part of the letter Basil says, "I know what a mother's heart is"; but Mr. Jackson, in his note on the words, well remarks that the mother might have replied in the words of Constance to Pandulph.[1] Evidently he appreciates that externality and hardness of tone that characterizes the letter, and makes it more of a rhetorical exercise than a spontaneous outburst of sympathy.

A few passages occur to me in which it may be doubted whether Mr. Jackson has fully caught the meaning. For example, *Ep.* 8, 1, when, evidently, Basil is replying to a letter of the people of Cæsareia, asking him to return from his sojourn with Gregory, he says, "Give me, therefore, I beg you, a little time. I am not embracing a city life." Mr. Jackson adds the note: "*i.e.*, the life of the city, presumably Nazianzus, from which he is writing." But surely a person who writes to the great city of Cæsareia from the small town of Nazianzus, and speaks of "city life" (*τὴν ἐν ταῖς πόλεσι διατριβήν*), must be referring to life in Cæsareia, not life in Nazianzus. Moreover, I cannot doubt, both from the context and the localities, that Basil was at the moment dwelling, not in Nazianzus, but in Carbala or Caprales (still called Gelvere), where Gregory's home was situated, where he was (as he intimates) enjoying the life of retirement and contemplation, and where to this day the memorials of Gregory are preserved, and the rock-cells mark the abode of many hermits in the succeeding ages.[2] I should venture to suggest that a thought has

[1] "He talks to me that never had a son."

[2] The exact localization of the home of Gregory, on the estate Arianzos, beside the village Carbala (or Caprales, Basil, *Ep.* 308), about eight miles south-west of Nazianzus (now called Nenizi), is made in *Historical Geography*

been left unexpressed by Basil from brevity and rapidity, and that the sense is, "a little time, pray, a little time grant me, I beg; [and then I shall come to you,] not welcoming the life of cities (for I am quite well aware of the danger caused to the soul in that life), but judging that the society of the saints [as contrasted with the solitary life of the hermit] is the most practically useful. [But grant me the delay,] for in the constant free interchange of ideas [with 'Gregory, Christ's mouth'] I am acquiring a deep-seated habit of contemplation." Elsewhere, also, Basil declares plainly his opinion that the life of action and public work is the more honourable, as it is the more wearisome and difficult and unpleasant side of the truly religious life.

As another example, take *Ep.* 190, § 1: "The most careless observer must at once perceive that it is in all respects more advantageous for care and anxiety to be divided among several bishops." This reads like a general maxim intended for wide application; but the Greek seems to me to need a different sense, applying solely to the case of Isaura, now under consideration, "it is more advantageous that the care of the district be divided[1] among several bishops." The case, which had been referred to Basil by Amphilochius, archbishop of Iconium, for advice, was a remarkable one. The large district round the great city Isaura had fallen into utter disorganization (probably owing to the unruly character of the Isaurians, who were frequently in rebellion). Several bishops were needed for the care of so large a district. Basil would prefer that a bishop for the city should first be appointed, who might

of Asia Minor, p. 286; see also Sir C. Wilson's *Handbook to Asia Minor*, etc. (Murray), p. 169. The modern village of Gelvere is built in the Tiberina, described by Gregory Naz., *Ep.* 6, 7, a narrow, rocky, picturesque glen, like a hole in the plain (4,500 feet above sea level), "the very pit of the whole earth," as Basil calls it (*Ep.* 14).

[1] *εἰς πλείονας ἐπισκόπους καταδιαιρεθῆναι τὴν μέριμναν.*

afterwards associate others with himself, as his experience showed him that they might be most usefully placed. But, owing to the danger that the bishop might be tempted by ambition to rule over a larger diocese, and might not consent to the ordination of others, he felt it safer to appoint in the first place bishops (*προϊσταμένους*) to the small towns or villages which were formerly the seats of bishops, and thereafter to select the bishop of the city. We have here a good example of the decay of bishoprics in political troubles, of the revival of disused bishoprics, and of the trouble that might be caused by an ambitious prelate.

Some other examples have struck me where opinions as to the meaning are likely to differ. But when we consider how little care has been devoted to the elucidation of Basil, and contrast it with the voluminous studies that have contributed to the long and difficult growth of the interpretation of Horace, or Virgil, or Sophocles, we can better appreciate the difficulties that Mr. Jackson had to face, and better estimate the gratitude we owe him.

W. M. RAMSAY.

CÆSAR AND GOD.

MARK xii. 13–17.

THE last days of Jesus were distinguished by the persistence and subtlety with which His enemies sought to "catch Him in talk." Their first attempt, in which they challenged the authority by which He acted as He did, was not only foiled, but retorted; they, and not He, were put to shame by the result (ch. xii. 27–32). But they soon returned to the charge, and the forces which they combined against Him—Pharisees and Herodians—show how various and how profound were the antipathies he had evoked. The Pharisees were fanatics in religion, and extreme