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THE ORTHODOX CHURCH IN THE BYZANTINE EMPIRE.[1]

I WILL not fill up the last minutes of the Congress with minute details of the subject about which I have to speak. Rather, I shall attempt to show it amid its surroundings as one aspect of the immemorial struggle between the East and the West. In the electric contact between Asia and Europe has been generated the greatest motive power throughout history; the impulse is constantly varying in character from age to age, yet the principle is fundamentally the same.

In the lands of the Aegean and the Levant the cardinal fact of history has always been and is now the struggle of Hellenism to make itself dominant. On the coasts and islands it rules almost by right of nature; and it is constantly striving to force its way inland. As a motive force in the Levant world it gained strength and direction by being moulded into the Roman organization; and the Roman Empire was in the East the Hellenic Empire, an invigorated Hellenism, which lost the charm, the delicacy, the purity and the aloofness of the unalloyed Greek spirit, but gained practical and penetrating power.

In one of his most remarkable papers, written in later life, when his genius and historic insight were brightest and most piercing, because they were guided by longer experience and by a width of knowledge almost beyond the right of mankind, Mommsen has described how the Roman Empire, at the moment when it seemed no longer

[1] Address delivered on behalf of Section VI (Church History) to the final general meeting of the entire Congress of Historical Sciences, Berlin, August 12, 1908.

capable of maintaining itself, was restored to vigour by the incorporation of a new idea into its constitution, and became the Christian Empire. This was only one out of many cases in which by a single article Mommsen either permanently changed thought regarding an old branch of study or created a new branch of study. He has made it impossible for any scholar ever again to say much of what used to be repeated parrot-like by generation after generation of scholars about the relation of the Church to the Roman State,[1] and he has made it urgently necessary that the history of the Roman Empire should be rewritten from a new point of view.

The new Christian Empire lasted as a power patent to the eyes of all the world for more than eleven hundred years. What was the idea, what the new factor in organization that recreated and rejuvenated the dying Roman Empire? It was the Church, the Church as an organized unity, the Church as a belief, and the Church as a body of ritual.

In this connexion we are struck with a certain difference between the Latin Church and the Greek. The Latin Church has often been able to maintain its hold on discordant nations: many peoples have remained faithful to the belief and the authority of the Roman Church, while preserving their independence, their separation, and their mutual hostility. But the Latin Church could not hold together the Western Empire. It never identified itself with the Empire. It represented a higher unity than the Roman Empire: so far as it lowered itself to stand on the same level as the Empire, it was a rival and an enemy rather than an ally of the Empire.

[1] *Der Religionsfrevel nach röm. Recht.* The legal aspect is restated in his *Strafrecht* from a different point of view, and in some details perhaps more correctly; but the older paper takes a far wider outlook and a more illuminative view than the legal book, which though published later stands nearer the ordinary point of survey.

But the Orthodox Church in the East cast in its lot with the Roman Empire; it was conterminous with, and never permanently wider than the Empire. It did not long attempt to stand on a higher level than the State and the people. It has not been an educating and elevating and purifying power. It has been content, on the whole, in spite of some notable and honourable exceptions, to accept the world as it was; and it has been too easily satisfied with mere allegiance and apparent loyalty to the State among all its adherents. It was the faithful ally of the Emperors. In the controversies of the fifth century it elected to side with the uneducated masses against the higher thought; and in an Œcumenical Council, at which the law of the whole Christian world should be determined, it admitted to its deliberations a Bishop who could not sign his name because he did not know letters. But on this lower level it stood closer to the mass of the people. It lived among them. It moved them with more penetrating power than a loftier religion could have done. Accordingly the Orthodox Church was fitted to be the soul and life of the Empire, to maintain the Imperial unity, to give form and direction to every manifestation of national vigour.

Practically the whole of Byzantine art that has lived is ecclesiastical, being concerned with the building and the adornment of churches, and of the residences of officials in Church and State. The subjects of its painting became more and more exclusively sacred. Art itself was frowned upon; and the controversy between Iconodouloi and Iconoclastai was to a certain extent a contest as to whether Art should not be expelled even from churches. Of Byzantine literature, if you take away what is directly or indirectly concerned with or originating out of the Church, how little remains! To letters the Orthodox Greek Church

has never been very favourable. It has never played the part in preserving the ancient classical literature that the Latin Church has played.

Yet it has always clung to the Hellenic language as tenaciously as it has allied itself with the Hellenized Empire, to which it had given new life; but it did so rather on political and social and religious grounds than from literary sympathy. Greek was necessarily the language of Hellenic civilization and order; and it was the language of the sacred books. Accordingly the Church destroyed the native languages of Asia Minor, and imposed the Greek speech on the entire population, though it could not completely do this in Syria or in Egypt. As it identified itself with the Imperial rule in the State, so it identified itself with Hellenism as a force in society; but its Hellenism was a degenerate representative of the old classical Hellenism, hardened and narrowed in its interests, but intense, powerful, strongly alive, resolute to make the single language, the Hellenic speech, dominant throughout the Church, yet able in the last resort to abandon for the moment, under the pressure of necessity or of overpowering national feeling, even the Hellenic speech, and to leave only the cultus and the hierarchy and the ritual of the One true Church as the sole living unity in the Empire.

The rise of every national movement that sought to develop itself within the Empire was consecrated and vitalized by the formation of a new Church. In some cases, as in the Armenian schism, or in the severance between the two great sections of the original Catholic and Imperial Church, viz., the Latin and the Greek, there was some difference of dogma, of creed, or of ritual. But these differences were, in the historian's view, not the essential features in the dissensions that ensued between the opposing sections of the Church. Those differences of

creed were only the insignia emblazoned on the standards of forces which were already arrayed against one another by national and other deep-lying causes of hostility. Accordingly in the severance between Slavic and Hellenic nationalities, in the bitter hatred that has often raged between Slav and Hellene, there is practically no difference of creed or ritual; there is only a difference of ecclesiastical organization. The separate nationality formed for itself a separate ecclesiastical system, and the two powers, which in truth represented two hostile races and two different systems of civilization and thought and ideals, regarded one another as rival Churches. Where the historian sees Hellenism in conflict with Slavic society, the combatants hate each other as ecclesiastical foes, orthodox on the one hand, schismatic on the other.

Before our eyes, in this present generation, there has occurred one of these great national and social struggles, a struggle still undetermined, between the Bulgarian and the Hellenic nationality. When the Bulgarian national feeling was growing sufficiently definite to take separate form and to disengage itself from the vague formless mass of the Christian subjects of Turkey, it expressed itself first by demanding and in the year 1870 attaining separate ecclesiastical standing as the Church of the Exarchate. Since that time the war to determine the bounds between the spheres of Hellenism and of Bulgarian nationality has been waged under the form of a struggle between the adherents of the Patriarchate and of the Exarchate. We at a distance hardly comprehend how completely the ecclesiastical question overpowers all else in the popular estimation. It is not blood, not language, that determines the mind of the masses; it is religion and the Church. The Bulgarian born and bred, who is Mohammedan by religion, sides with the Turks; the Bulgarian who is of

the Patriarchate chooses Hellenism, and in ordinary course (if the natural tendency of history is not forcibly disturbed) his descendants will ultimately become Hellenes in language also; only in the Exarchate is the Bulgarian nationality supreme and lasting. Religion and the Church is the dominant principle.

In the islands and in Asia Minor you find the same condition. The Church is the one bond to hold together in feeling, aspirations and patriotism the scattered Hellenes. When we began to travel in the country thirty years ago, there were many cities and villages, where the Orthodox Church claimed the adherence of considerable bodies of population, yet where the Greek language was neither spoken nor understood. These people had no common blood: they were Isaurians, or Cappadocians, or Lycaonians, men of Pontus or Bithynia or Phrygia. But they were one people in virtue of their one Church; they knew themselves to be Hellenes, because they belonged to the Church of the Hellenes. The memory of their past lived among these Hellenes, and as that memory grew stronger it awoke their ancient tongue to life; and now their children all speak the language of the Eastern Roman Empire, and look forward to the reawakening of the Christian[1] unity as a practical factor in the development of the country. That old Roman Empire is not dead, but sleeping. It will die only when Hellenism ceases in the Aegean lands, and when the Church is no longer a living force among their population.

We see, then, what a power among men this Orthodox Church has been and still is—not a lovable power, not a

[1] It is the only "Christian" Empire to the Hellenes, who call no man Christian unless he is a member of the Orthodox Church. The old distinction between Hellenes and Barbaroi is now expressed as a classification into "Christians" or Orthodox and all others.

beneficent power, but stern, unchanging, not exactly hostile to but certainly careless of literature and art and civilization, sufficient for itself, self-contained and self-centred. The historian must regard with interest this marvellous phenomenon, and he must try to understand it as it appears in the centuries.

I set before you a problem and a question. I do not attempt to answer it. It is not my province or my work to propose theories; but to ask questions, to state problems, and to observe and register facts, looking at them in the light of these questions. And during the last seven years, it has fallen to my lot to study closely the monuments, the hieratic architecture and the epitaphs which reveal something of the development of the Orthodox Church in the region of Lycaonia. I have had to copy many hundreds of Christian inscriptions ranging from the grave-stone of a bishop of the third century to an epitaph dated under the Seljuk Turks in the years 1160–1169. It would be pedantic and impossible on this occasion to attempt even an outline of the results which follow from the study of these epitaphs, and of the "thousand-and-one churches"[1] in which the piety of the inhabitants found expression. I shall restrict myself to a few general statements.

1. The inscriptions are almost all engraved upon the tombstones of the ordinary population of a provincial district. Even the bishops who are mentioned must, as a rule, be regarded as mere village-bishops (*χωρεπίσκοποι*). Similarly, the ecclesiastical buildings belong not to capitals of provinces or to great cities, but to villages and unimportant towns, where there was little education

[1] This name (Bin-Bir-Kilisse) is the descriptive appellation given by outsiders to the modern village which occupies part of the site of the ancient Barata, but not used by the villagers themselves (who call their home Maden-Sheher).

but a high standard of material comfort. Those of which I to-day speak lie in and around the humble and almost unknown town of Barata. But in the humbleness of its information lies the real value of this evidence. It reveals to us the lower and the middle class of society; it sets before us the commonplace individuals who composed the Imperial State.

The epitaphs help to fill up a gap in the information which literary authorities furnish about the Christian Empire. Those authorities give their attention to emperors and courtiers and generals, to the capital of the Empire with its mob and its splendours, to bishops and church leaders, to œcumenical councils and the rise of heresies. But the world is made up of ordinary, commonplace men. The leaders cannot exist, unless there is a people to be led. There are indeed scattered about in the literary authorities certain pieces of evidence about the common world; and there are more in the private correspondence of writers and great men. But this evidence has never been collected. It is to the humbler epitaphs that we must look for aid in attempting to estimate the influence which the Church exerted on the mass of the people, and to appreciate the standard of education and life which it produced among the general population, especially in small towns and villages.

The Lycaonian gravestones will give at least the beginning of the material for answering the questions which are thus raised. Though a few of the epitaphs are earlier and a moderate number are later, yet the great mass of them belong to the fourth and fifth centuries (especially the period 330–450 A.D.). They set before us, on the whole, the Church as it was from the time of Constantine to that of Theodosius, the Church of Basil of Caesareia, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Amphilochius

of Iconium—a great period in ecclesiastical history. I am convinced that some passages in the literature and many in the letters written by the contemporary leaders of the Church will acquire a new and fuller meaning and more living realism through comparison with these memorials of their humble followers.

To take just one example. When Gregory of Nyssa wished about 380–390 A.D. to build a memorial chapel, he wrote to Amphilochius at Iconium begging him to furnish workmen capable of executing the work, and he wrote afterwards a very full description of the cruciform church which he hoped to build. We have now abundant evidence that the cruciform was in those regions the accepted type for memorial churches. We find in the country subject to the metropolitan bishop of Iconium a quite unexpected number of churches in almost every form known to Byzantine architecture. And we see in the gravestones through the country north and north-east from Iconium a marked inferiority in the technique of sculptor and architect, and an equally marked superiority throughout the hill-country that lies near Iconium on the south and south-west. The fashionable type of ornament on the gravestones of this latter region is architectural, as if architecture were the dominant art in the district. It was, therefore, natural that the Bishop of Nyssa should have recourse to Iconium for artisans able to build and to adorn the church which he had in mind.

The picture of the Lycaonian Church that we put together from these humble memorials is, on the whole, a very favourable one. The Church was still the educator of the people. The Presbyteros is set before us in simple, striking terms as the helper of the orphan, the widow, the poor and the stranger. We have little or no trace of alliance with the State : we have the Church of the people,

creator of charitable and hospitable institutions, the Church as it was in the mind and the aspirations of Basil.

We find Lycaonia a Christian land in the fourth century.[1] It is the one province of Asia Minor whose ecclesiastical organization can be traced already perfect and complete in the councils of the fourth century. This organization, therefore, must be in great part older than the persecution of Diocletian. From the correspondence of Basil of Caesareia we learn that as early as A.D. 370 a city church was already only one part of a great surrounding complex of buildings for public utility, a centre for social and public convenience. The church was already fully marked as the focus of city life; and future discovery will, beyond all question, carry back the beginnings of this conception of the ecclesiastical building to a much earlier time. It is the original idea of the early Christian world, when the Church raised its claim in competition with the Empire to be the parent and guide of the people. The Christian establishment took the place of the ancient Anatolian hieron.

Such was the constructive and governing idea which was embodied in Basil's great foundation at Caesareia of Cappadocia—which included an almshouse, a place of entertainment for strangers, both those who were on a journey and those who required medical treatment on account of sickness, and so established a means of giving these men the comfort they wanted—doctors, means of conveyance, and escort."[2] A church is mentioned[3] as part of this establishment. It was the necessary centre for the whole series of constructions. The Caesarean establish-

[1] The few pagan inscriptions of the period belong, some certainly, some probably, to the engineered anti-Christian movement under Diocletian and Maximin, on which see *Pauline and other Studies*, p. 106 ff.

[2] *Pauline and other Studies*, p. 385.

[3] See the description given by Basil of the principal buildings in his Letter XCIV.

ment illustrates the view taken by the whole Church in the early centuries.

Even the cistern or water-tank at such centres was intended, not as a baptistery for hieratic purposes, but simply to afford a supply of water for public convenience: this is proved by the cisterns at many establishments similar in character but smaller in scale, which we have found throughout Lycaonia. In that waterless region a permanent water-supply was indispensable for comfort; and as running water can very rarely be supplied, a tank or cistern for storage was used instead of the fountain, which would have been employed in a district where streams and running sources were abundant.

2. In the second place, it has fallen to my lot to co-operate in studying and excavating a group of about seventy churches in and around the Lycaonian city of Barata, fifty miles south-east of Ikonion, and subject from 372 A.D. onwards to the metropolitan of that city. These churches form a definite group, possessing a certain unity, revealing to us the history of a small Lycaonian city from the fifth to the twelfth century. The memorials of city life were no longer recorded in inscriptions and the other monuments of the old Greek cities: they stand before us in the churches built by the piety or the sense of public duty of the people, often by the piety of individuals similar to the Bishop of Laodiceia. These churches have to be studied by the historians as the one form in which the public spirit and patriotism of the Byzantine cities sought expression. The church was the focus of the national life, and the ecclesiastical buildings mirrored the fortunes and the sufferings of the people.

To take one example: the outstanding fact with regard to the Byzantine Empire as a whole and with regard especially to Asia Minor, is that they were exposed to the full force of the attack which the barbarism of Asia was

constantly making on the Roman Empire and the Hellenic civilization.[1] The Church of Anatolia, if we rightly estimate its character, could not remain insensible to the great national struggle against the Sassanian and Arab invaders, that dread, ever-present danger. Accordingly, we find that one of the churches at Barata was the *memorion* of a citizen who "died in the war," another of one who "endured many wounds," and a third was built as the memorial of a general who had led the Byzantine armies: his name is not given, but only his position in the Empire, for he was doubtless the only native of this obscure town that ever attained that high rank in the army, and hence he is called simply "the Domestikos." The largest and probably the most magnificent church in the town was decorated with paintings executed by certain artists, who are named, under the direction of Indakos, monk, presbyter and eponymous tribune; and a fifth church was dedicated according to the vow of Mammas the Tribune. When we see that churches form the angle of the fortifications of the city, that monasteries make part of the walls, that a small church crowns many a little hill near the line of the walls as well as every high peak of the mountains farther away, we realize that the Byzantine Church marshalled and inspired the Hellenes of the later Empire to defend Hellenism against barbarism, and that the Tribunes who built those churches were at once ecclesiastical, municipal, and military officers.

Hitherto we have been too much disposed to think that because the regular army of the Empire was professional and the soldiers of the later Roman period were almost a caste and not a truly national army, no power of resistance and self-defence was developed in the districts that were most exposed to Arab attack. But the churches of Barata

[1] See e.g., *Studies in the History of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, p. 287.

tell a different tale, and their evidence is confirmed at a later period by the example of Philadelphia,[1] which maintained itself by the energy of its own citizens, unaided and even disowned by the Empire, against the victorious Turks for a century. Where the people had the army to depend on, they trusted to it ; but where, as in Barata and Philadelphia, they were left open to the constant attacks of the enemy without military protection, they trusted to themselves and the Saints. It was Michael, commander of the hosts of heaven, and the other Saints on every prominent point of the city and every peak of the mountain, who marshalled and stimulated the defensive efforts of the people of Barata.

Here, again, we see how close the Imperial Church stood to the life of the people. But this nearness was bought at a heavy price, and much of the character of the Orthodox Church was sacrificed to attain it. If we take the succession of the ecclesiastical buildings at Barata, ranging from the fifth to the tenth or the eleventh century, we can trace in them, especially through their dedications, the change of feeling : we see the degeneration of the Imperial Church to the popular level of thought and religion, the revival of the old pagan religion of Asia Minor, and the resuscitation of the ancient gods under Christian names.

An example, the most striking out of many, occurs on the summit of the mountain that overhangs Barata on the south. Standing on that lofty peak, an island in the Lycaonian plain, 7,000 feet above sea level, one remembers the ancient idea, nowhere stronger than in Anatolia, that all lofty peaks were the chosen home of Divine power, and feels certain that this was a " High Place " of the old paganism. The proof is at hand. Although in the change of religion the old sanctuary has been destroyed, and a

[1] *Letters to the Seven Churches*, pp. 400, 412.

monastery, a church and a memorial chapel (which bears the name of Leo), cover almost the entire summit, and conceal the earlier features of the place, yet the traces of the original "High Place" are not entirely obliterated.

In the rocks that support the church on the north side is a passage, partly natural, partly artificial, now to some extent narrowed by walls of the Byzantine period. On the rock walls of this passage, perhaps formerly hidden by Byzantine building, are two inscriptions in the ancient hieroglyphics, which are now generally called Hittite, but which were probably Anatolian in origin.[1] These put the ancient sacral character of the locality beyond all question. We have here the first known example of a Hittite "High Place" not entirely destroyed; and we see that its ancient sanctity was preserved in a Christianized form by the Byzantine Church.

A few miles to the north-west, on a little outlying peak of the mountain, is another "High Place," untouched by any destroying hand except that of time and weather, where a pinnacle of rock lent itself readily to be cut into the rough semblance of a great "throne," on which the unseen power of the god might rest. It bears two inscriptions in the Anatolian hieroglyphics and a representation either of the god or of his priest-king equipped in the semblance of the god. Here the ancient sanctity was not officially maintained by the Orthodox Church, and therefore the features of the locality remain unaltered.

It is rarely possible to determine the exact form either of the ancient pagan cult or of the Christian transformation. It is probable from the modern name Mahalitch, the highest peak, where the memorial chapel of Leo and the other foundations stand, that the church was dedicated to Michael

[1] The argument to this effect is stated in the Preface to my *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, I. p. xiv. f.

the Archangel, who led the hosts of heaven in aid of the Christian people. He was often worshipped on mountains and as the protector of Byzantine cities ; and, as he is mentioned in the opening line of a long inscription in the largest church of Barata, he must doubtless have been regarded as its champion against the Arab and other invaders. The memorial chapel of a certain Paul in the ninth century was dedicated to St. Konon. St. George is painted on the aisle of an early church. The name of Michael can be read beside a defaced painting in the north entrance of another. These are the only details that we have recovered.

We observe three periods in the development of the churches of Barata and the vicinity. During the fifth to the seventh century, we have churches in the lower city, and a group of monasteries high on the hills above the city. From A.D. 700 to 850 we trace the destruction of the lower city by the Arabs, and the formation of the principal group of monasteries into a fortified town. Between 850 and 1070 occurred the revival of the lower city, as the Arabs were driven back and the danger which had driven the people of Barata into the safe obscurity of the mountains diminished and came to an end. Then the people began to rebuild in the lower ground the ancient city, which now lies a ruined town of the period 850–1070. Several of the largest churches which had fallen into ruins were then restored and remodelled ; and it is still possible to trace the changes which were made in order to repair as quickly as possible the shell of the old buildings. Some of the smaller churches perhaps remained standing, having survived the destruction wrought by the Arabs and perhaps by earthquakes. But the majority of the churches which the traveller surveys were probably built from the foundations in the ninth or tenth century. The city was now of smaller extent, and at least one church seems to have been left unrepaired on the western side of the town.

A deterioration in the builder's art is now manifest. The churches were built on good old plans; but the work was carried out rudely and probably in great haste; yet the haste is rather that of carelessness than of urgent need. There are no signs of loving desire to make the work as good and rich as possible. We cannot, indeed, say how far colour may have been employed to supplement the strictly architectural work; but the style is indisputably rather mean in character. The late churches produce the general impression of a degenerating people, a dying civilization, an epoch of ignorance, and an Empire going to ruin.

Still, with all their faults, even these late buildings retain for the most part a certain dignity and an effective simplicity. The tradition of the old Byzantine architecture was preserved in this sequestered nook, so long as the Imperial government maintained itself. Even now the architectural ideal is not wholly destroyed. It is there in those ruined and deserted churches, which breathe inspiration for those who understand them—and especially for every Hellene. The ideal can perish only when the last Hellene dies, and that ideal is the expression in concrete form of the Church of the Hellenes. But when, however, the Christian Empire shrank to narrower limits, and Barata was left to the Turks, the dignity of the Imperial Church was lost, and its places of worship show themselves plainly to be the meeting-places of a servile population.

The Imperial Church lives, and while it lives the Imperial unity is not dead, but only asleep. It is like the old German Kaiser Barbarossa, who led his army of the great Crusade from the Hellespont to Cilicia, triumphing over every difficulty with marvellous skill and tenacity of purpose, to disappear from the eyes of men in the waters of the Calycadnos: but the creative imagination of popular belief knew that he is not dead, that he waits the moment and the signal to reappear among men. So it is with Hellenism

as a world-power. It may revive: the Church has always to be reckoned with as a possibility in the future. Asia has in store as great issues and as great surprises for the western world in the future as she has often produced in the past.

And since I have mentioned the Kaiser of romance and the Crusade that he led across Asia Minor, I may venture, in the last words addressed to the Historical Congress in the German Capital, to recall the new German Crusade which is conducting another march across the same land. It is no more an army of mail-clad warriors. It is an army of engineers and workmen. At Dorylaion, where the first Crusade fought its first great battle, at Ikonion, where Barbarossa gained his greatest victory, you find now large German workshops and German hotels. This new Crusade moves more slowly than the army of Barbarossa; but it moves more surely. It has surmounted difficulties as great as those which Kaiser Friederich met. It has yet other even greater difficulties to encounter. It has to accommodate its organization to the people of the land, and give form to itself as part of the national resources.

The historian must regard with the keenest attention this great historical development. He must admire the forethought and the patient tenacity with which every obstacle is provided for and overcome, and he watches with interest how the arrangement with the Orthodox Church and the power of the new Hellenism will be concluded. For myself, as I have loved on many journeys to trace step by step the victorious march of the old German Kaiser, and as I have with keenest interest and growing admiration watched every stage from the beginning of this new Crusade, so I look forward to observing on what terms and in what spirit the new Crusaders will meet—as they must inevitably at some time meet—the force of the old Imperial Church.

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