

Chapter XXI: Persecution Of Heresy, State Of The Church.--Part VI.

Athanasius had indeed escaped from the most imminent dangers; and the adventures of that extraordinary man deserve and fix our attention. On the memorable night when the church of St. Theonas was invested by the troops of Syrianus, the archbishop, seated on his throne, expected, with calm and intrepid dignity, the approach of death. While the public devotion was interrupted by shouts of rage and cries of terror, he animated his trembling congregation to express their religious confidence, by chanting one of the psalms of David which celebrates the triumph of the God of Israel over the haughty and impious tyrant of Egypt. The doors were at length burst open: a cloud of arrows was discharged among the people; the soldiers, with drawn swords, rushed forwards into the sanctuary; and the dreadful gleam of their arms was reflected by the holy luminaries which burnt round the altar. [136]

Athanasius still rejected the pious importunity of the monks and presbyters, who were attached to his person; and nobly refused to desert his episcopal station, till he had dismissed in safety the last of the congregation. The darkness and tumult of the night favored the retreat of the archbishop; and though he was oppressed by the waves of an agitated multitude, though he was thrown to the ground, and left without sense or motion, he still recovered his undaunted courage, and eluded the eager search of the soldiers, who were instructed by their Arian guides, that the head of Athanasius would be the most acceptable present to the emperor. From that moment the primate of Egypt disappeared from the eyes of his enemies, and remained above six years concealed in

impenetrable obscurity. [137]

[Footnote 136: These minute circumstances are curious, as they are literally transcribed from the protest, which was publicly presented three days afterwards by the Catholics of Alexandria. See Athanas. tom. 1. n. 867]

[Footnote 137: The Jansenists have often compared Athanasius and Arnauld, and have expatiated with pleasure on the faith and zeal, the merit and exile, of those celebrated doctors. This concealed parallel is very dexterously managed by the Abbe de la Bleterie, Vie de Jovien, tom. i. p. 130.]

The despotic power of his implacable enemy filled the whole extent of the Roman world; and the exasperated monarch had endeavored, by a very pressing epistle to the Christian princes of Ethiopia, [137a] to exclude Athanasius from the most remote and sequestered regions of the earth. Counts, praefects, tribunes, whole armies, were successively employed to pursue a bishop and a fugitive; the vigilance of the civil and military powers was excited by the Imperial edicts; liberal rewards were promised to the man who should produce Athanasius, either alive or dead; and the most severe penalties were denounced against those who should dare to protect the public enemy. [138] But the deserts of Thebais were now peopled by a race of wild, yet submissive fanatics, who preferred the commands of their abbot to the laws of their sovereign. The numerous disciples of Antony and Pachonnus received the fugitive primate as their

father, admired the patience and humility with which he conformed to their strictest institutions, collected every word which dropped from his lips as the genuine effusions of inspired wisdom; and persuaded themselves that their prayers, their fasts, and their vigils, were less meritorious than the zeal which they expressed, and the dangers which they braved, in the defence of truth and innocence. [139] The monasteries of Egypt were seated in lonely and desolate places, on the summit of mountains, or in the islands of the Nile; and the sacred horn or trumpet of Tabenne was the well-known signal which assembled several thousand robust and determined monks, who, for the most part, had been the peasants of the adjacent country. When their dark retreats were invaded by a military force, which it was impossible to resist, they silently stretched out their necks to the executioner; and supported their national character, that tortures could never wrest from an Egyptian the confession of a secret which he was resolved not to disclose. [140] The archbishop of Alexandria, for whose safety they eagerly devoted their lives, was lost among a uniform and well-disciplined multitude; and on the nearer approach of danger, he was swiftly removed, by their officious hands, from one place of concealment to another, till he reached the formidable deserts, which the gloomy and credulous temper of superstition had peopled with daemons and savage monsters. The retirement of Athanasius, which ended only with the life of Constantius, was spent, for the most part, in the society of the monks, who faithfully served him as guards, as secretaries, and as messengers; but the importance of maintaining a more intimate connection with the Catholic party tempted him, whenever the diligence of the

pursuit was abated, to emerge from the desert, to introduce himself into Alexandria, and to trust his person to the discretion of his friends and adherents. His various adventures might have furnished the subject of a very entertaining romance. He was once secreted in a dry cistern, which he had scarcely left before he was betrayed by the treachery of a female slave; [141] and he was once concealed in a still more extraordinary asylum, the house of a virgin, only twenty years of age, and who was celebrated in the whole city for her exquisite beauty. At the hour of midnight, as she related the story many years afterwards, she was surprised by the appearance of the archbishop in a loose undress, who, advancing with hasty steps, conjured her to afford him the protection which he had been directed by a celestial vision to seek under her hospitable roof. The pious maid accepted and preserved the sacred pledge which was intrusted to her prudence and courage. Without imparting the secret to any one, she instantly conducted Athanasius into her most secret chamber, and watched over his safety with the tenderness of a friend and the assiduity of a servant. As long as the danger continued, she regularly supplied him with books and provisions, washed his feet, managed his correspondence, and dexterously concealed from the eye of suspicion this familiar and solitary intercourse between a saint whose character required the most unblemished chastity, and a female whose charms might excite the most dangerous emotions. [142] During the six years of persecution and exile, Athanasius repeated his visits to his fair and faithful companion; and the formal declaration, that he saw the councils of Rimini and Seleucia, [143] forces us to believe that he was secretly present at the time and place of their convocation. The

advantage of personally negotiating with his friends, and of observing and improving the divisions of his enemies, might justify, in a prudent statesman, so bold and dangerous an enterprise: and Alexandria was connected by trade and navigation with every seaport of the Mediterranean. From the depth of his inaccessible retreat the intrepid primate waged an incessant and offensive war against the protector of the Arians; and his seasonable writings, which were diligently circulated and eagerly perused, contributed to unite and animate the orthodox party. In his public apologies, which he addressed to the emperor himself, he sometimes affected the praise of moderation; whilst at the same time, in secret and vehement invectives, he exposed Constantius as a weak and wicked prince, the executioner of his family, the tyrant of the republic, and the Antichrist of the church. In the height of his prosperity, the victorious monarch, who had chastised the rashness of Gallus, and suppressed the revolt of Sylvanus, who had taken the diadem from the head of Vetrico, and vanquished in the field the legions of Magnentius, received from an invisible hand a wound, which he could neither heal nor revenge; and the son of Constantine was the first of the Christian princes who experienced the strength of those principles, which, in the cause of religion, could resist the most violent exertions [144] of the civil power.

[Footnote 137a: These princes were called Aezanas and Saiazanas. Athanasius calls them the kings of Axum. In the superscription of his letter, Constantius gives them no title. Mr. Salt, during his first journey in Ethiopia, (in 1806,) discovered, in the ruins of Axum, a

long and very interesting inscription relating to these princes. It was erected to commemorate the victory of Aeizanas over the Bougaitae, (St. Martin considers them the Blemmyes, whose true name is Bedjah or Bodjah.) Aeizanas is styled king of the Axumites, the Homerites, of Raeidan, of the Ethiopians, of the Sabsuites, of Silea, of Tiamo, of the Bougaites. and of Kaei. It appears that at this time the king of the Ethiopians ruled over the Homerites, the inhabitants of Yemen. He was not yet a Christian, as he calls himself son of the invincible Mars. Another brother besides Saiazanas, named Adephas, is mentioned, though Aeizanas seems to have been sole king. See St. Martin, note on Le Beau, ii. 151. Salt's Travels. De Sacy, note in Annales des Voyages, xii. p. 53.--M.]

[Footnote 138: Hinc jam toto orbe profugus Athanasius, nec ullus ci tutus ad latendum supererat locus. Tribuni, Praefecti, Comites, exercitus quoque ad pervestigandum cum moventur edictis Imperialibus; praemia dela toribus proponuntur, si quis eum vivum, si id minus, caput certe Atha casii detulisset. Rufin. l. i. c. 16.]

[Footnote 139: Gregor. Nazianzen. tom. i. Orat. xxi. p. 384, 385. See Tillemont Mem. Eccles. tom. vii. p. 176-410, 820-830.]

[Footnote 140: Et nulla tormentorum vis inveneri, adhuc potuit, quae obdurato illius tractus latroni invito elicere potuit, ut nomen proprium dicat Ammian. xxii. 16, and Valesius ad locum.]

[Footnote 141: Rufin. l. i. c. 18. Sozomen, l. iv. c. 10. This and the following story will be rendered impossible, if we suppose that Athanasius always inhabited the asylum which he accidentally or occasionally had used.]

[Footnote 142: Paladius, (Hist. Lausiac. c. 136, in Vit. Patrum, p. 776,) the original author of this anecdote, had conversed with the damsel, who in her old age still remembered with pleasure so pious and honorable a connection. I cannot indulge the delicacy of Baronius, Valesius, Tillemont, &c., who almost reject a story so unworthy, as they deem it, of the gravity of ecclesiastical history.]

[Footnote 143: Athanas. tom. i. p. 869. I agree with Tillemont, (tom. iii. p. 1197,) that his expressions imply a personal, though perhaps secret visit to the synods.]

[Footnote 144: The epistle of Athanasius to the monks is filled with reproaches, which the public must feel to be true, (vol. i. p. 834, 856;) and, in compliment to his readers, he has introduced the comparisons of Pharaoh, Ahab, Belshazzar, &c. The boldness of Hilary was attended with less danger, if he published his invective in Gaul after the revolt of Julian; but Lucifer sent his libels to Constantius, and almost challenged the reward of martyrdom. See Tillemont, tom. vii. p. 905.]

The persecution of Athanasius, and of so many respectable

bishops, who suffered for the truth of their opinions, or at least for the integrity of their conscience, was a just subject of indignation and discontent to all Christians, except those who were blindly devoted to the Arian faction. The people regretted the loss of their faithful pastors, whose banishment was usually followed by the intrusion of a stranger [145] into the episcopal chair; and loudly complained, that the right of election was violated, and that they were condemned to obey a mercenary usurper, whose person was unknown, and whose principles were suspected. The Catholics might prove to the world, that they were not involved in the guilt and heresy of their ecclesiastical governor, by publicly testifying their dissent, or by totally separating themselves from his communion. The first of these methods was invented at Antioch, and practised with such success, that it was soon diffused over the Christian world. The doxology or sacred hymn, which celebrates the glory of the Trinity, is susceptible of very nice, but material, inflections; and the substance of an orthodox, or an heretical, creed, may be expressed by the difference of a disjunctive, or a copulative, particle. Alternate responses, and a more regular psalmody, [146] were introduced into the public service by Flavianus and Diodorus, two devout and active laymen, who were attached to the Nicene faith. Under their conduct a swarm of monks issued from the adjacent desert, bands of well-disciplined singers were stationed in the cathedral of Antioch, the Glory to the Father, And the Son, And the Holy Ghost, [147] was triumphantly chanted by a full chorus of voices; and the Catholics insulted, by the purity of their doctrine, the Arian prelate, who had usurped the throne of the venerable Eustathius. The same zeal which

inspired their songs prompted the more scrupulous members of the orthodox party to form separate assemblies, which were governed by the presbyters, till the death of their exiled bishop allowed the election and consecration of a new episcopal pastor. [148] The revolutions of the court multiplied the number of pretenders; and the same city was often disputed, under the reign of Constantius, by two, or three, or even four, bishops, who exercised their spiritual jurisdiction over their respective followers, and alternately lost and regained the temporal possessions of the church. The abuse of Christianity introduced into the Roman government new causes of tyranny and sedition; the bands of civil society were torn asunder by the fury of religious factions; and the obscure citizen, who might calmly have surveyed the elevation and fall of successive emperors, imagined and experienced, that his own life and fortune were connected with the interests of a popular ecclesiastic. The example of the two capitals, Rome and Constantinople, may serve to represent the state of the empire, and the temper of mankind, under the reign of the sons of Constantine.

[Footnote 145: Athanasius (tom. i. p. 811) complains in general of this practice, which he afterwards exemplifies (p. 861) in the pretended election of Faelix. Three eunuchs represented the Roman people, and three prelates, who followed the court, assumed the functions of the bishops of the Suburbicarian provinces.]

[Footnote 146: Thomassin (*Discipline de l'Eglise*, tom. i. l. ii. c. 72, 73, p. 966-984) has collected many curious facts concerning the origin

and progress of church singing, both in the East and West. * Note: Arius appears to have been the first who availed himself of this means of impressing his doctrines on the popular ear: he composed songs for sailors, millers, and travellers, and set them to common airs; "beguiling the ignorant, by the sweetness of his music, into the impiety of his doctrines." Philostorgius, ii. 2. Arian singers used to parade the streets of Constantinople by night, till Chrysostom arrayed against them a band of orthodox choristers. Sozomen, viii. 8.--M.]

[Footnote 147: Philostorgius, l. iii. c. 13. Godefroy has examined this subject with singular accuracy, (p. 147, &c.) There were three heterodox forms: "To the Father by the Son, and in the Holy Ghost." "To the Father, and the Son in the Holy Ghost;" and "To the Father in the Son and the Holy Ghost."]

[Footnote 148: After the exile of Eustathius, under the reign of Constantine, the rigid party of the orthodox formed a separation which afterwards degenerated into a schism, and lasted about fourscore years. See Tillemont, Mem. Eccles. tom. vii. p. 35-54, 1137-1158, tom. viii. p. 537-632, 1314-1332. In many churches, the Arians and Homoousians, who had renounced each other's communion, continued for some time to join in prayer. Philostorgius, l. iii. c. 14.]

I. The Roman pontiff, as long as he maintained his station and his principles, was guarded by the warm attachment of a great people; and could reject with scorn the prayers, the menaces, and the oblations of

an heretical prince. When the eunuchs had secretly pronounced the exile of Liberius, the well-grounded apprehension of a tumult engaged them to use the utmost precautions in the execution of the sentence. The capital was invested on every side, and the praefect was commanded to seize the person of the bishop, either by stratagem or by open force. The order was obeyed, and Liberius, with the greatest difficulty, at the hour of midnight, was swiftly conveyed beyond the reach of the Roman people, before their consternation was turned into rage. As soon as they were informed of his banishment into Thrace, a general assembly was convened, and the clergy of Rome bound themselves, by a public and solemn oath, never to desert their bishop, never to acknowledge the usurper Faelix; who, by the influence of the eunuchs, had been irregularly chosen and consecrated within the walls of a profane palace. At the end of two years, their pious obstinacy subsisted entire and unshaken; and when Constantius visited Rome, he was assailed by the importunate solicitations of a people, who had preserved, as the last remnant of their ancient freedom, the right of treating their sovereign with familiar insolence. The wives of many of the senators and most honorable citizens, after pressing their husbands to intercede in favor of Liberius, were advised to undertake a commission, which in their hands would be less dangerous, and might prove more successful. The emperor received with politeness these female deputies, whose wealth and dignity were displayed in the magnificence of their dress and ornaments: he admired their inflexible resolution of following their beloved pastor to the most distant regions of the earth; and consented that the two bishops, Liberius and Faelix, should govern in peace their respective

congregations. But the ideas of toleration were so repugnant to the practice, and even to the sentiments, of those times, that when the answer of Constantius was publicly read in the Circus of Rome, so reasonable a project of accommodation was rejected with contempt and ridicule. The eager vehemence which animated the spectators in the decisive moment of a horse-race, was now directed towards a different object; and the Circus resounded with the shout of thousands, who repeatedly exclaimed, "One God, One Christ, One Bishop!" The zeal of the Roman people in the cause of Liberius was not confined to words alone; and the dangerous and bloody sedition which they excited soon after the departure of Constantius determined that prince to accept the submission of the exiled prelate, and to restore him to the undivided dominion of the capital. After some ineffectual resistance, his rival was expelled from the city by the permission of the emperor and the power of the opposite faction; the adherents of Faelix were inhumanly murdered in the streets, in the public places, in the baths, and even in the churches; and the face of Rome, upon the return of a Christian bishop, renewed the horrid image of the massacres of Marius, and the proscriptions of Sylla.

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[Footnote 149: See, on this ecclesiastical revolution of Rome, Ammianus, xv. 7 Athanas. tom. i. p. 834, 861. Sozomen, l. iv. c. 15. Theodoret, l. ii c. 17. Sulp. Sever. Hist. Sacra, l. ii. p. 413. Hieronym. Chron. Marcellin. et Faustin. Libell. p. 3, 4. Tillemont, Mem. Eccles. tom. vi. p.]

II. Notwithstanding the rapid increase of Christians under the reign of the Flavian family, Rome, Alexandria, and the other great cities of the empire, still contained a strong and powerful faction of Infidels, who envied the prosperity, and who ridiculed, even in their theatres, the theological disputes of the church. Constantinople alone enjoyed the advantage of being born and educated in the bosom of the faith. The capital of the East had never been polluted by the worship of idols; and the whole body of the people had deeply imbibed the opinions, the virtues, and the passions, which distinguished the Christians of that age from the rest of mankind. After the death of Alexander, the episcopal throne was disputed by Paul and Macedonius. By their zeal and abilities they both deserved the eminent station to which they aspired; and if the moral character of Macedonius was less exceptionable, his competitor had the advantage of a prior election and a more orthodox doctrine. His firm attachment to the Nicene creed, which has given Paul a place in the calendar among saints and martyrs, exposed him to the resentment of the Arians. In the space of fourteen years he was five times driven from his throne; to which he was more frequently restored by the violence of the people, than by the permission of the prince; and the power of Macedonius could be secured only by the death of his rival. The unfortunate Paul was dragged in chains from the sandy deserts of Mesopotamia to the most desolate places of Mount Taurus, [150] confined in a dark and narrow dungeon, left six days without food, and at length strangled, by the order of Philip, one of the principal ministers of the emperor Constantius. [151] The first blood which stained the new capital was spilt in this ecclesiastical contest; and many persons were slain

on both sides, in the furious and obstinate seditions of the people. The commission of enforcing a sentence of banishment against Paul had been intrusted to Hermogenes, the master-general of the cavalry; but the execution of it was fatal to himself. The Catholics rose in the defence of their bishop; the palace of Hermogenes was consumed; the first military officer of the empire was dragged by the heels through the streets of Constantinople, and, after he expired, his lifeless corpse was exposed to their wanton insults. [152] The fate of Hermogenes instructed Philip, the Praetorian praefect, to act with more precaution on a similar occasion. In the most gentle and honorable terms, he required the attendance of Paul in the baths of Xeuxippus, which had a private communication with the palace and the sea. A vessel, which lay ready at the garden stairs, immediately hoisted sail; and, while the people were still ignorant of the meditated sacrilege, their bishop was already embarked on his voyage to Thessalonica. They soon beheld, with surprise and indignation, the gates of the palace thrown open, and the usurper Macedonius seated by the side of the praefect on a lofty chariot, which was surrounded by troops of guards with drawn swords. The military procession advanced towards the cathedral; the Arians and the Catholics eagerly rushed to occupy that important post; and three thousand one hundred and fifty persons lost their lives in the confusion of the tumult. Macedonius, who was supported by a regular force, obtained a decisive victory; but his reign was disturbed by clamor and sedition; and the causes which appeared the least connected with the subject of dispute, were sufficient to nourish and to kindle the flame of civil discord. As the chapel in which the body of the great

Constantine had been deposited was in a ruinous condition, the bishop transported those venerable remains into the church of St. Acacius. This prudent and even pious measure was represented as a wicked profanation by the whole party which adhered to the Homoousian doctrine. The factions immediately flew to arms, the consecrated ground was used as their field of battle; and one of the ecclesiastical historians has observed, as a real fact, not as a figure of rhetoric, that the well before the church overflowed with a stream of blood, which filled the porticos and the adjacent courts. The writer who should impute these tumults solely to a religious principle, would betray a very imperfect knowledge of human nature; yet it must be confessed that the motive which misled the sincerity of zeal, and the pretence which disguised the licentiousness of passion, suppressed the remorse which, in another cause, would have succeeded to the rage of the Christians at Constantinople. [153]

[Footnote 150: Cucusus was the last stage of his life and sufferings. The situation of that lonely town, on the confines of Cappadocia, Cilicia, and the Lesser Armenia, has occasioned some geographical perplexity; but we are directed to the true spot by the course of the Roman road from Caesarea to Anazarbus. See Cellarii Geograph. tom. ii. p. 213. Wesseling ad Itinerar. p. 179, 703.]

[Footnote 151: Athanasius (tom. i. p. 703, 813, 814) affirms, in the most positive terms, that Paul was murdered; and appeals, not only to common fame, but even to the unsuspecting testimony of Philagrius,

one of the Arian persecutors. Yet he acknowledges that the heretics attributed to disease the death of the bishop of Constantinople. Athanasius is servilely copied by Socrates, (l. ii. c. 26;) but Sozomen, who discovers a more liberal temper. presumes (l. iv. c. 2) to insinuate a prudent doubt.]

[Footnote 152: Ammianus (xiv. 10) refers to his own account of this tragic event. But we no longer possess that part of his history. Note: The murder of Hermogenes took place at the first expulsion of Paul from the see of Constantinople.--M.]

[Footnote 153: See Socrates, l. ii. c. 6, 7, 12, 13, 15, 16, 26, 27, 38, and Sozomen, l. iii. 3, 4, 7, 9, l. iv. c. ii. 21. The acts of St. Paul of Constantinople, of which Photius has made an abstract, (Phot. Bibliot. p. 1419-1430,) are an indifferent copy of these historians; but a modern Greek, who could write the life of a saint without adding fables and miracles, is entitled to some commendation.]