

Chapter XLVII: Ecclesiastical Discord.--Part VI.

A more important conquest still remained, of the patriarch, the oracle and leader of the Egyptian church. Theodosius had resisted the threats and promises of Justinian with the spirit of an apostle or an enthusiast. "Such," replied the patriarch, "were the offers of the tempter when he showed the kingdoms of the earth. But my soul is far dearer to me than life or dominion. The churches are in the hands of a prince who can kill the body; but my conscience is my own; and in exile, poverty, or chains, I will steadfastly adhere to the faith of my holy predecessors, Athanasius, Cyril, and Dioscorus. Anathema to the tome of Leo and the synod of Chalcedon! Anathema to all who embrace their creed! Anathema to them now and forevermore! Naked came I out of my mother's womb, naked shall I descend into the grave. Let those who love God follow me and seek their salvation." After comforting his brethren, he embarked for Constantinople, and sustained, in six successive interviews, the almost irresistible weight of the royal presence. His opinions were favorably entertained in the palace and the city; the influence of Theodora assured him a safe conduct and honorable dismissal; and he ended his days, though not on the throne, yet in the bosom, of his native country. On the news of his death, Apollinaris indecently feasted the nobles and the clergy; but his joy was checked by the intelligence of a new election; and while he enjoyed the wealth of Alexandria, his rivals reigned in the monasteries of Thebais, and were maintained by the voluntary oblations of the people. A perpetual succession of patriarchs arose from the ashes of Theodosius; and the

Monophysite churches of Syria and Egypt were united by the name of Jacobites and the communion of the faith. But the same faith, which has been confined to a narrow sect of the Syrians, was diffused over the mass of the Egyptian or Coptic nation; who, almost unanimously, rejected the decrees of the synod of Chalcedon. A thousand years were now elapsed since Egypt had ceased to be a kingdom, since the conquerors of Asia and Europe had trampled on the ready necks of a people, whose ancient wisdom and power ascend beyond the records of history. The conflict of zeal and persecution rekindled some sparks of their national spirit. They abjured, with a foreign heresy, the manners and language of the Greeks: every Melchite, in their eyes, was a stranger, every Jacobite a citizen; the alliance of marriage, the offices of humanity, were condemned as a deadly sin the natives renounced all allegiance to the emperor; and his orders, at a distance from Alexandria, were obeyed only under the pressure of military force. A generous effort might have redeemed the religion and liberty of Egypt, and her six hundred monasteries might have poured forth their myriads of holy warriors, for whom death should have no terrors, since life had no comfort or delight. But experience has proved the distinction of active and passive courage; the fanatic who endures without a groan the torture of the rack or the stake, would tremble and fly before the face of an armed enemy. The pusillanimous temper of the Egyptians could only hope for a change of masters; the arms of Chosroes depopulated the land, yet under his reign the Jacobites enjoyed a short and precarious respite. The victory of Heraclius renewed and aggravated the persecution, and the patriarch again escaped from Alexandria to the desert. In his flight, Benjamin was encouraged by

a voice, which bade him expect, at the end of ten years, the aid of a foreign nation, marked, like the Egyptians themselves, with the ancient rite of circumcision. The character of these deliverers, and the nature of the deliverance, will be hereafter explained; and I shall step over the interval of eleven centuries to observe the present misery of the Jacobites of Egypt. The populous city of Cairo affords a residence, or rather a shelter, for their indigent patriarch, and a remnant of ten bishops; forty monasteries have survived the inroads of the Arabs; and the progress of servitude and apostasy has reduced the Coptic nation to the despicable number of twenty-five or thirty thousand families; [148] a race of illiterate beggars, whose only consolation is derived from the superior wretchedness of the Greek patriarch and his diminutive congregation. [149]

[Footnote 148: This number is taken from the curious *Recherches sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois*, (tom. ii. p. 192, 193,) and appears more probable than the 600,000 ancient, or 15,000 modern, Copts of Gemelli Carreri Cyril Lucar, the Protestant patriarch of Constantinople, laments that those heretics were ten times more numerous than his orthodox Greeks, ingeniously applying Homer, (*Iliad*, ii. 128,) the most perfect expression of contempt, (*Fabric. Lux Evangelii*, 740.)]

[Footnote 149: The history of the Copts, their religion, manners, &c., may be found in the Abbe Renaudot's motley work, neither a translation nor an original; the *Chronicon Orientale* of Peter, a Jacobite; in the two versions of Abraham Ecchellensis, Paris, 1651; and John Simon

Asseman, Venet. 1729. These annals descend no lower than the xiiith century. The more recent accounts must be searched for in the travellers into Egypt and the *Nouveaux Memoires des Missions du Levant*. In the last century, Joseph Abudacnus, a native of Cairo, published at Oxford, in thirty pages, a slight *Historia Jacobitarum*, 147, post p.150]

VI. The Coptic patriarch, a rebel to the Caesars, or a slave to the khalifs, still gloried in the filial obedience of the kings of Nubia and Aethiopia. He repaid their homage by magnifying their greatness; and it was boldly asserted that they could bring into the field a hundred thousand horse, with an equal number of camels; [150] that their hand could pour out or restrain the waters of the Nile; [151] and the peace and plenty of Egypt was obtained, even in this world, by the intercession of the patriarch. In exile at Constantinople, Theodosius recommended to his patroness the conversion of the black nations of Nubia, from the tropic of Cancer to the confines of Abyssinia. [152] Her design was suspected and emulated by the more orthodox emperor. The rival missionaries, a Melchite and a Jacobite, embarked at the same time; but the empress, from a motive of love or fear, was more effectually obeyed; and the Catholic priest was detained by the president of Thebais, while the king of Nubia and his court were hastily baptized in the faith of Dioscorus. The tardy envoy of Justinian was received and dismissed with honor: but when he accused the heresy and treason of the Egyptians, the negro convert was instructed to reply that he would never abandon his brethren, the true believers, to the persecuting ministers of the synod of Chalcedon. [153] During several

ages, the bishops of Nubia were named and consecrated by the Jacobite patriarch of Alexandria: as late as the twelfth century, Christianity prevailed; and some rites, some ruins, are still visible in the savage towns of Sennaar and Dongola. [154] But the Nubians at length executed their threats of returning to the worship of idols; the climate required the indulgence of polygamy, and they have finally preferred the triumph of the Koran to the abasement of the Cross. A metaphysical religion may appear too refined for the capacity of the negro race: yet a black or a parrot might be taught to repeat the words of the Chalcedonian or Monophysite creed.

[Footnote 150: About the year 737. See Renaudot, Hist. Patriarch. Alex p. 221, 222. Elmacin, Hist. Saracen. p. 99.]

[Footnote 151: Ludolph. Hist. Aethiopic. et Comment. 1. i. c. 8. Renaudot Hist. Patriarch. Alex. p. 480, &c. This opinion, introduced into Egypt and Europe by the artifice of the Copts, the pride of the Abyssinians, the fear and ignorance of the Turks and Arabs, has not even the semblance of truth. The rains of Aethiopia do not, in the increase of the Nile, consult the will of the monarch. If the river approaches at Napata within three days' journey of the Red Sea (see D'Anville's Maps,) a canal that should divert its course would demand, and most probably surpass, the power of the Caesars.]

[Footnote 152: The Abyssinians, who still preserve the features and olive complexion of the Arabs, afford a proof that two thousand years

are not sufficient to change the color of the human race. The Nubians, an African race, are pure negroes, as black as those of Senegal or Congo, with flat noses, thick lips, and woolly hair, (Buffon, Hist. Naturelle, tom. v. p. 117, 143, 144, 166, 219, edit. in 12mo., Paris, 1769.) The ancients beheld, without much attention, the extraordinary phenomenon which has exercised the philosophers and theologians of modern times]

[Footnote 153: Asseman. Bibliot. Orient. tom. i. p. 329.]

[Footnote 154: The Christianity of the Nubians (A.D. 1153) is attested by the sheriff al Edrisi, falsely described under the name of the Nubian geographer, (p. 18,) who represents them as a nation of Jacobites. The rays of historical light that twinkle in the history of Ranaudot (p. 178, 220--224, 281--286, 405, 434, 451, 464) are all previous to this aera. See the modern state in the Lettres Edifiantes (Recueil, iv.) and Busching, (tom. ix. p. 152--139, par Berenger.)]

Christianity was more deeply rooted in the Abyssinian empire; and, although the correspondence has been sometimes interrupted above seventy or a hundred years, the mother-church of Alexandria retains her colony in a state of perpetual pupilage. Seven bishops once composed the Aethiopic synod: had their number amounted to ten, they might have elected an independent primate; and one of their kings was ambitious of promoting his brother to the ecclesiastical throne. But the event was foreseen, the increase was denied: the episcopal office has been

gradually confined to the abuna, [155] the head and author of the Abyssinian priesthood; the patriarch supplies each vacancy with an Egyptian monk; and the character of a stranger appears more venerable in the eyes of the people, less dangerous in those of the monarch. In the sixth century, when the schism of Egypt was confirmed, the rival chiefs, with their patrons, Justinian and Theodora, strove to outstrip each other in the conquest of a remote and independent province. The industry of the empress was again victorious, and the pious Theodora has established in that sequestered church the faith and discipline of the Jacobites. [156] Encompassed on all sides by the enemies of their religion, the Aethiopians slept near a thousand years, forgetful of the world, by whom they were forgotten. They were awakened by the Portuguese, who, turning the southern promontory of Africa, appeared in India and the Red Sea, as if they had descended through the air from a distant planet. In the first moments of their interview, the subjects of Rome and Alexandria observed the resemblance, rather than the difference, of their faith; and each nation expected the most important benefits from an alliance with their Christian brethren. In their lonely situation, the Aethiopians had almost relapsed into the savage life. Their vessels, which had traded to Ceylon, scarcely presumed to navigate the rivers of Africa; the ruins of Axume were deserted, the nation was scattered in villages, and the emperor, a pompous name, was content, both in peace and war, with the immovable residence of a camp. Conscious of their own indigence, the Abyssinians had formed the rational project of importing the arts and ingenuity of Europe; [157] and their ambassadors at Rome and Lisbon were instructed to solicit a colony of

smiths, carpenters, tilers, masons, printers, surgeons, and physicians, for the use of their country. But the public danger soon called for the instant and effectual aid of arms and soldiers, to defend an unwarlike people from the Barbarians who ravaged the inland country and the Turks and Arabs who advanced from the sea-coast in more formidable array. Aethiopia was saved by four hundred and fifty Portuguese, who displayed in the field the native valor of Europeans, and the artificial power of the musket and cannon. In a moment of terror, the emperor had promised to reconcile himself and his subjects to the Catholic faith; a Latin patriarch represented the supremacy of the pope: [158] the empire, enlarged in a tenfold proportion, was supposed to contain more gold than the mines of America; and the wildest hopes of avarice and zeal were built on the willing submission of the Christians of Africa.

[Footnote 155: The abuna is improperly dignified by the Latins with the title of patriarch. The Abyssinians acknowledge only the four patriarchs, and their chief is no more than a metropolitan or national primate, (Ludolph. Hist. Aethiopic. et Comment. l. iii. c. 7.) The seven bishops of Renaudot, (p. 511,) who existed A.D. 1131, are unknown to the historian.]

[Footnote 156: I know not why Assemanus (Bibliot. Orient. tom. ii. p. 384) should call in question these probable missions of Theodora into Nubia and Aethiopia. The slight notices of Abyssinia till the year 1500 are supplied by Renaudot (p. 336-341, 381, 382, 405, 443, &c., 452, 456, 463, 475, 480, 511, 525, 559--564) from the Coptic writers. The mind of

Ludolphus was a perfect blank.]

[Footnote 157: Ludolph. Hist. Aethiop. 1. iv. c. 5. The most necessary arts are now exercised by the Jews, and the foreign trade is in the hands of the Armenians. What Gregory principally admired and envied was the industry of Europe--artes et opificia.]

[Footnote 158: John Bermudez, whose relation, printed at Lisbon, 1569, was translated into English by Purchas, (Pilgrims, 1. vii. c. 7, p. 1149, &c.) and from thence into French by La Croze, (Christianisme d'Ethiopie, p. 92--265.) The piece is curious; but the author may be suspected of deceiving Abyssinia, Rome, and Portugal. His title to the rank of patriarch is dark and doubtful, (Ludolph. Comment. No. 101, p. 473.)]

But the vows which pain had extorted were forsworn on the return of health. The Abyssinians still adhered with unshaken constancy to the Monophysite faith; their languid belief was inflamed by the exercise of dispute; they branded the Latins with the names of Arians and Nestorians, and imputed the adoration of four gods to those who separated the two natures of Christ. Fremona, a place of worship, or rather of exile, was assigned to the Jesuit missionaries. Their skill in the liberal and mechanic arts, their theological learning, and the decency of their manners, inspired a barren esteem; but they were not endowed with the gift of miracles, [159] and they vainly solicited a reenforcement of European troops. The patience and dexterity of forty

years at length obtained a more favorable audience, and two emperors of Abyssinia were persuaded that Rome could insure the temporal and everlasting happiness of her votaries. The first of these royal converts lost his crown and his life; and the rebel army was sanctified by the abuna, who hurled an anathema at the apostate, and absolved his subjects from their oath of fidelity. The fate of Zadenghel was revenged by the courage and fortune of Susneus, who ascended the throne under the name of Segued, and more vigorously prosecuted the pious enterprise of his kinsman. After the amusement of some unequal combats between the Jesuits and his illiterate priests, the emperor declared himself a proselyte to the synod of Chalcedon, presuming that his clergy and people would embrace without delay the religion of their prince. The liberty of choice was succeeded by a law, which imposed, under pain of death, the belief of the two natures of Christ: the Abyssinians were enjoined to work and to play on the Sabbath; and Segued, in the face of Europe and Africa, renounced his connection with the Alexandrian church. A Jesuit, Alphonso Mendez, the Catholic patriarch of Aethiopia, accepted, in the name of Urban VIII., the homage and abjuration of the penitent. "I confess," said the emperor on his knees, "I confess that the pope is the vicar of Christ, the successor of St. Peter, and the sovereign of the world. To him I swear true obedience, and at his feet I offer my person and kingdom." A similar oath was repeated by his son, his brother, the clergy, the nobles, and even the ladies of the court: the Latin patriarch was invested with honors and wealth; and his missionaries erected their churches or citadels in the most convenient stations of the empire. The Jesuits themselves deplore the fatal indiscretion of

their chief, who forgot the mildness of the gospel and the policy of his order, to introduce with hasty violence the liturgy of Rome and the inquisition of Portugal. He condemned the ancient practice of circumcision, which health, rather than superstition, had first invented in the climate of Aethiopia. [160] A new baptism, a new ordination, was inflicted on the natives; and they trembled with horror when the most holy of the dead were torn from their graves, when the most illustrious of the living were excommunicated by a foreign priest. In the defense of their religion and liberty, the Abyssinians rose in arms, with desperate but unsuccessful zeal. Five rebellions were extinguished in the blood of the insurgents: two abunas were slain in battle, whole legions were slaughtered in the field, or suffocated in their caverns; and neither merit, nor rank, nor sex, could save from an ignominious death the enemies of Rome. But the victorious monarch was finally subdued by the constancy of the nation, of his mother, of his son, and of his most faithful friends. Segued listened to the voice of pity, of reason, perhaps of fear: and his edict of liberty of conscience instantly revealed the tyranny and weakness of the Jesuits. On the death of his father, Basilides expelled the Latin patriarch, and restored to the wishes of the nation the faith and the discipline of Egypt. The Monophysite churches resounded with a song of triumph, "that the sheep of Aethiopia were now delivered from the hyaenas of the West;" and the gates of that solitary realm were forever shut against the arts, the science, and the fanaticism of Europe. [161]

[Footnote 159: Religio Romana...nec precibus patrum nec miraculis ab

ipsis editis suffulciebatur, is the uncontradicted assurance of the devout emperor Susneus to his patriarch Mendez, (Ludolph. Comment. No. 126, p. 529;) and such assurances should be preciousy kept, as an antidote against any marvellous legends.]

[Footnote 160: I am aware how tender is the question of circumcision. Yet I will affirm, 1. That the Aethiopians have a physical reason for the circumcision of males, and even of females, (Recherches Philosophiques sur les Americains, tom. ii.) 2. That it was practised in Aethiopia long before the introduction of Judaism or Christianity, (Herodot. 1. ii. c. 104. Marsham, Canon. Chron. p. 72, 73.) "Infantes circumcidunt ob consuetudinemn, non ob Judaisimum," says Gregory the Abyssinian priest, (apud Fabric. Lux Christiana, p. 720.) Yet in the heat of dispute, the Portuguese were sometimes branded with the name of uncircumcised, (La Croze, p. 90. Ludolph. Hist. and Comment. 1. iii. c. 1.)]

[Footnote 161: The three Protestant historians, Ludolphus, (Hist. Aethiopica, Francofurt. 1681; Commentarius, 1691; Relatio Nova, &c., 1693, in folio,) Geddes, (Church History of Aethiopia, London, 1696, in 8vo..) and La Croze, (Hist. du Christianisme d'Ethiopie et d'Armenie, La Haye, 1739, in 12mo..) have drawn their principal materials from the Jesuits, especially from the General History of Tellez, published in Portuguese at Coimbra, 1660. We might be surprised at their frankness; but their most flagitious vice, the spirit of persecution, was in their eyes the most meritorious virtue. Ludolphus possessed some, though

a slight, advantage from the Aethiopic language, and the personal conversation of Gregory, a free-spirited Abyssinian priest, whom he invited from Rome to the court of Saxe-Gotha. See the *Theologia Aethiopica* of Gregory, in (*Fabric. Lux Evangelii*, p. 716--734.) *

Note: The travels of Bruce, illustrated by those of Mr. Salt, and the narrative of Nathaniel Pearce, have brought us again acquainted with this remote region. Whatever may be their speculative opinions the barbarous manners of the Ethiopians seem to be gaining more and more the ascendancy over the practice of Christianity.--M.]