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LAMBETH AND RE-UNION IN PERSIA.

BY THE RIGHT REV. J. H. LINTON, Bishop in Persia.

ONE really must begin with Henry Martyn, and for the simple reason that the biggest factor in the movement for a United Church of Persia is nothing more nor less than the place the Scriptures have in the life and practice of the Persian Church. Martyn offered as a missionary to the C.M.S. in 1802, the first Englishman to offer to the Society, for work as a foreign missionary. His friends in Cambridge thought it a most improper step that he should leave the University to preach the Gospel to the heathen. Anyone could do that! Martyn's gifts were too valuable to be thus wasted! How history has annihilated that criticism, for if one of the predominant causes for the decay of the early Christian Church in Persia was the fact that it had not the Scriptures in the vernacular, surely the emphasis on the Scriptures has been the life of the Church in Persia in these later days. And Martyn gave Persia the New Testament. In 1806 Martyn arrived in Madras to take up an appointment under the East India Company, and three years later we find him in Cawnpore translating the New Testament into Hindustani, Arabic and Persian. Realizing the need of a more idiomatic translation into Persian, Martyn came to Shiraz in 1811, and, to the Christian Church, Shiraz is not so much the city of the poets Hafez and Sa'adi, as the city of Henry Martyn, and the birthplace of the Persian New Testament. In eight months he had completed the New Testament and had also translated the Psalms. Cambridge grudged him to the East, but Sir James Morier, afterwards Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Persia, wrote of Martyn: "Martyr at 31 years of age, the highest title of Henry Martyn to everlasting remembrance is that he gave the Persians in their own tongue the Testament of the one Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and the Hebrew Psalms." Martyn died on October 16, 1812, at Tokat in Armenia, disappointed in not being permitted to present in person to the Shah a copy of the Scriptures. But the British Ambassador, Sir Gore Ouseley, promised Martyn that he would himself do so, and he fulfilled his promise. The Shah graciously received the beautifully transcribed copy which Martyn had had prepared. The Armenian clergy at Tokat laid God's saint to rest. To-day, that "corn of wheat" is "bearing much fruit."

Half a century passed by, and Colonel Stewart, a Christian officer in the Indian Army, riding through Persia in disguise, was filled with the desire to see the Gospel preached in Persia. It was he who inspired Robert Bruce, an Irishman from Cork, then a missionary in India, to visit Persia. Bruce's visit in 1869 coincided with the great famine, and he stayed on to help in famine relief for the Persians and Armenians in Isfahan. In 1875 the C.M.S.

formally adopted the work as a mission of the Society. Bruce applied himself to the translation of the Old Testament and revised Martyn's translation of the New Testament. In 1811 Martyn wrote: "Persia is in many respects a ripe field for the harvest," but he saw how the Persians, though willing to listen and susceptible to the message of the Gospel, held back from open faith because of the terrors of the Law of Apostasy. Bruce saw the beginning of organized work among the Moslems of Isfahan, the establishment of hospital and school work, and the first-fruits of his labours in the baptism of several converts from Islam. But it was too soon yet to speak of a Persian Church. Indeed, Bruce's constant phrase was "we are as yet hardly sowing seed. We are only gathering out stones."

Meanwhile, the American Board had begun to explore North-West Persia and in 1833 had actually opened work in Urumia. This was soon followed by work in Tabriz, and to-day that mission has also important stations in Teheran, Hamadan, Doulatabad, Kermanshah, Resht, Meshed and Zinjan. C.M.S. occupies Isfahan, Yezd, Kerman and Shiraz, in each of which there is a flourishing church composed of converts from Islam. The B.C.M.S. has recently opened work in Duzdab and Seistan, and there is a most interesting and successful bit of work in Rafsenjan carried on entirely by Persian Christians.

One satisfactory feature in all this work has ever been the practical unity that has existed in the missions in the field, and their essential oneness in the proclamation of the Gospel. The Church in the North is Presbyterian in character. It is a Presbyterian Mission that founded and carries on the work in that area. Similarly the work in the South is Episcopal. But neither in the North nor in the South has the emphasis ever been on the outward form of organization, but on the preaching of the Gospel, on winning men and women to a living faith in the Crucified risen, living Saviour. The unifying factor has been "the message of the Cross." But there is a strong "Church" feeling, and this it is that is emphasizing in the mind of the Persian Christians the need for unity. For the Church is His Body. There has always been in the two missions a real fellowship. It is both inward and spiritual and also outward and actual. Let theologians and ecclesiastics in the secluded quiet of their studies say what they will about such fellowship, we, in the circumstances of our work in Persia, have never seriously questioned our custom of sharing with each other all the fellowship that our Lord bequeathed to His Church in the Ministry of the Word and the Sacraments. It is our conviction that such is for us, and for His Church in Persia, the will of God. This unity of the spirit is also a reality in the whole Church in Persia and is bound to issue at length in some form of united organization.

In 1925 an Inter-Church Conference was held at Hamadan. I think it was probably at this conference that Persian Christians first seriously understood that they were organically a divided Church. It came to them in the nature of a shock. They naturally

asked questions. Why were they divided? Who had divided them? And, with some shame, we missionaries had to accept the responsibility. We tried to explain the historical reasons that lay behind our home divisions, but this made no appeal to Persian Christians, who felt that they were not implicated in our history and were not prepared to accept the consequences of our past divisions. They would, therefore, at once unite! So they appointed a Committee of fourteen members "to draw up rules of union." Of this committee ten were Persians, and these alone had the power of voting. Four non-Persians, of whom I was one, had only advisory power. I was Chairman of the Committee. The whole situation was difficult. Whether they themselves grasped the fact or not, the Persian Church was in real need of teaching as to what was involved in the proposal to form a United Church of Persia. So we got things slowed down a bit. It was planned to hold a second conference at Isfahan in 1927. This was fully representative of all the local Evangelical Churches in Persia. The Committee on Unity prepared a series of Findings which the whole conference accepted. The Persian Church would fain have gone forward at once on the basis of these "Fundamental Principles." Again, much against the desire of my own heart, I had to put the brake on: "I have an oath of canonical obedience to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and I must consult my Church before I go forward." Then someone asked, "But *who* is the Archbishop of Canterbury? And why should he want to hinder us in our desire to have a United Church?" We tried to explain. But England is very far away from Persia, and at times the link is felt to be very slender indeed! Moreover, in some other spheres, English shares are not worth a great deal in Persia, and this, too, affects matters in the Church. And so the clause was inserted asking for "independence from the See of Canterbury" and similarly from the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in U.S.A. We may be inclined to criticize this as petulant, but no one who understands the strong national spirit that is stirring the whole of the East at this time, and is as strong within the Church as outside it, can fail to grasp the significance of that request. The Inter-Church Conference in Isfahan expressed its willingness to wait till after Lambeth, 1930, but then——!

Comment has been made in various quarters on the fact that in the Persia proposals for a United Church, they put Church Order rather a long way down. The explanation may perhaps be found in another fact, viz., the emphasis on the Holy Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Henry Martyn used to say of his method in disputes: "I bring forward no arguments, but calmly refer them to the Holy Scriptures." It is worth noting that while the Persian Church recorded its acceptance of Episcopacy, it did not base its acceptance on the decrees of Councils, nor on the evidence of history, but on the Word of God. It was not prepared to commit itself to any particular form of Episcopacy, and it just as clearly accepted the place of the Presbyter, and on

the same authority. The emphasis is everywhere on the authority of the Scriptures and the guidance of the Spirit of God. For which we thank God and take courage.

I was commissioned by the Persian Church to present their case to Lambeth, and I tried to do so as honestly as I could.

There were 73 members on the Unity Committee, representing every point of view in our very comprehensive Church of England. The most important item on our programme was, of course, the South India Scheme. Readers of the *CHURCHMAN* will readily call to mind the attitude of the Anglo-Catholic press in the days prior to Lambeth to the whole Unity movement. Now we had all that in concentrated form present at Lambeth; and the Anglo-Catholic constituency looked to its leaders to see that what they regarded as "catholic principles" were not jeopardized. But there were also present those of us to whom this question of Unity in our own area is a matter of life and death for the Church. And there were others, English and Colonial diocesans, whose sympathies were on the side of greater liberty in the matter of inter-communion and Re-union. Visualize it, and you will realize, as we did, that some miracle of the Holy Spirit had to happen if open cleavage was to be avoided. No wonder we "feared as we entered the cloud." Moreover, it was useless to produce a Report which would simply be a watered-down, innocuous statement of our common faith, or an ambiguously worded compromise which could be read one way by one group, and quite differently by another. There were also negotiations with the Eastern Churches to be taken into account. There is no point in minimising how serious it was at times, and, indeed, some wondered whether it was any longer possible to preserve the "Synthesis" of such opposing traditions and ideals in the Anglican Communion. Must we, after all, each go our separate ways? If that had to be,—if we were clearly and unequivocally convinced that this was the will of God for us, we would have faced up to it, even though it was with breaking hearts. The Anglo-Catholics were feeling this, I believe, just as sincerely and as keenly as we were. Then—something happened. It was, I am convinced, God's answer to world-wide prayer. It was the Spirit of God Himself who came upon us, revealing to us individually and corporately what was His will for us at this present time. There was a giving in and a giving up on both sides: not, I believe, of essential principles—but a giving up of the effort and strife to get all our own way at any cost. We all feel, from our respective standpoints, that we have not got all we wanted, nor all we had hoped for. But we thank God for what has been accomplished in some matters, and for signposts indicating the line of future progress in others.

With regard to the Persia proposals in particular, I think a great part of the Conference had not previously grasped our situation. But the reception of the proposals was certainly cordial, and some who for various reasons had previously opposed our scheme, gave us their willing support. The Committee unanimously passed the following paragraphs:

We have received the Proposals for a United Church of Persia as approved by the Inter-Church Conference held at Isfahan, July 23 to August 5, 1927.

We rejoice to hear of the growth of this Young Church in a Moslem land, and its zeal in the evangelization of Islam ; and desire to express our sympathy with the fervent desire of the Persian Church to be organically united.

We note that the Church in Persia is, for different reasons set forth in the Proposals, not yet ready for formal Union. We encourage the Church in Persia, however, to go forward towards this goal, carefully studying present movements in other parts towards Church Unity, and, in particular, the Scheme for a united Church of South India.

We regard it as essential for the Unity of the Church that the Historic Episcopate, in a constitutional form, should be definitely aimed at as the Order of the United Church of Persia. By this we do not mean that it should be an Anglican Church ; indeed, we hope that the Church of Persia, developing along the lines of its own genius, will have some particular contribution of its own to bring into the Catholic Church. But we urge that, if the Church of Persia is to be a vital part of the great Re-united Church, it should go forward along the lines of the threefold historic Ministry of Bishops, Priests and Deacons, on which lines the Church is so clearly moving to-day.

We sympathize with the Church of Persia in its natural desire to be independent of external jurisdiction, and we look forward to the time when it will be completely free to develop according to its own national genius as a Province of the Church Universal. In the meantime, while steps are being taken to reach this goal, we gladly place at the disposal of the Persian Church all the experience that the Anglican Communion has gathered during the course of its history.

We have given sympathetic regard to the proposal that, at future ordinations in the two divisions in the Church, prior to the Consummation of Union, two ordained ministers from the Northern (Presbyterian) Churches join in the Laying-on of Hands at the ordination of an Episcopal minister ; and, similarly, that the Bishop should take part in the Laying-on of Hands at the ordination of a minister in the Presbyterian Church. We recognize that there are inherent difficulties in this proposal, but recommend that in view of the situation existing in the Church in Persia, due enquiry be made with a view to discovering whether some Scheme of Joint Ordination be possible, always providing, on our part, that the essentially Episcopal nature of the ordination be properly safeguarded.

and the Conference gave its general approval to this section of the Report.

There are just two points in the above on which I propose to comment :

1. The Archbishop of Canterbury in a personal talk with me expressed his sympathy with the desire of the Persian Church to be freed from external control, and he indicated the degree of progress in the Church of Persia which he would feel to be adequate to justify him in relinquishing his control. He also graciously promised to give me a letter on that subject to be read to the Persian Church. This will, I am sure, give real satisfaction to the Church in Persia.

2. With regard to the proposal for Joint Ordination in the meantime, until such time as the Church in Persia is organically united. Some time ago, the Presbyterian Church in North Persia handed over to me one of their candidates for ordination, that he should receive his training at our hands. That act in itself indicates the spirit of mutual trust that exists. The question will now at

once arise whether I will take part in his ordination. This will have to be faced, and on the answer much will depend which will be of far-reaching importance for the Church of Persia. It is probable that the ordination will be timed to take place during the next Inter-Church Conference which is to be held in 1931.

The subject of inter-communion between non-episcopal and episcopal churches is one that vitally affects us in Persia, and our circumstances had much to do with the passing of Resolution 42 headed "Special Areas." Many of us looked forward to something much more generous than the very carefully guarded permission given in this resolution, doubly safe-guarded by an explanatory note. For instance, I find it simply impossible to believe that we have to wait till all else has been accomplished in the way of Re-union before we can share in the fellowship of the Lord's Table with our non-episcopal brethren. I am no advocate of indiscriminate or purposeless inter-communion. Where there is a "will to schism" it seems incongruous to ask for this act of fellowship. But, on the other hand, many of us have proved it to be a factor in producing and sealing the "will to unity," and it is vain to ask us to deny our experience. Again, it would be unthinkable in Persia to deny to our episcopal church members who travel North the privilege of fellowship in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the Presbyterian Church in North Persia. That would be a position to which I could not possibly subscribe. I also welcome to the Holy Communion such baptized communicant members of the Presbyterian Church who come to us. Lambeth has now given its sanction to this, and it is a considerable advance on anything previously admitted by a Lambeth Conference. But we went even further than this. At big conventions and international missionary conferences there have been times when the "Unity of the Spirit" has been such a real experience that the desire to seal this Spirit of Unity in our Lord's own great act of Fellowship has been felt to be overwhelming. Resolution 42 shows that we faced frankly what was involved. There are all sorts of barbed-wire fences, hedges and high walls indicating that only "very special circumstances" are considered, and the "regulations" are certainly "very strict"! But, for those who are convinced that God is leading them to brave the thorns and barbed wire in such "very special circumstances," the Bishops of the Anglican Communion will not question the action of any Bishop who may in his discretion, exercised in accordance with the terms of the Resolution, sanction an exception to the general rule in such circumstances as those which obtain, say, in Persia, or in other special or temporary circumstances. Those "special or temporary circumstances" cover such an inter-communion as that in which I took part at the Jerusalem Conference or the Keswick Convention. But they would not cover anything in the nature of indiscriminate "gadding about" from one church to another whenever the fancy dictates. God is a God of order, and order in the Church is essential to its well-being.

It is too soon yet to express an opinion as to how the Persian

Church will receive the action of Lambeth on its proposals. It will come officially before the Church at the Inter-Church Conference to be held, D.V., at Teheran in 1931. What we pray for, and look forward to, is that we may be able to accomplish such an organic unity in the Persian Church as shall preserve at the same time our present fellowship in the Churches which have brought to Persia the message of the Gospel. Our God is sufficient for these things.

A FAITH FOR TO-DAY. By the Rev. George S. Marr, M.A., B.D., D.Litt., M.B., Ch.B. *London: H. R. Allenson, Ltd. 2s. 6d. net.*

The author of this treatise is a Presbyterian Minister in Edinburgh, and as he tells us in his preface he writes with a definite object in view—he feels that a re-united Church calls for a re-constituted Creed. His endeavour is to furnish such a re-statement with the conviction that it has been long overdue. We must confess to being a little doubtful as to the necessity for such a reconstruction, but Dr. Marr states clearly and courageously some of the opinions which are held by the majority of thinking men and women at the present time. We suspect that many of our readers may find themselves unable to follow him along some of the ways he is prepared to go. He is prepared, for example, to scrap the “literal inerrancy of the Bible,” and he says “there are passages in St. Paul’s Epistles which are entirely foreign to our modern outlook on life and to which we simply cannot subscribe.” In much the same way Dr. Marr regards those views on the Atonement which are what most of us would describe as “Orthodox”—they are supposed to alienate “thinking men,” and we are told that “the Church should boldly declare that while these theories no doubt served their day and generation they must be acknowledged to-day to be exploded, because they are quite inadequate to satisfy the modern mind and outlook. Let them go.” Our business is not to discover what is agreeable to the modern mind but what is TRUTH. This is the most important. We might buy even so great a blessing as reunion at too high a price, and we cannot afford to sacrifice the fundamental doctrines of our faith even to secure consolidation. In order to show that we have not misunderstood Dr. Marr’s purpose let us close with a suggestion from his last page, where he asks, “Is it not possible, therefore, for those who are interested in the matter of a frank re-statement of the Church’s belief, to unite and form a party resembling in some respects at least the Modernist party in the Church of England?” We look for better things and a more uncompromising fidelity in Scotland!

S. R. C.