

**THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE EAST IN THE
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY: BEING THE
CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE EASTERN
PATRIARCHS AND THE NONJURING BISHOPS WITH
AN INTRODUCTION ON VARIOUS PROJECTS OF
REUNION BETWEEN THE EASTERN CHURCH AND
THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION**

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The Orthodox Church of the East in the eighteenth century: being the correspondence between the eastern patriarchs and the nonjuring bishops with an introduction on various projects of reunion between the Eastern Church and the Anglican Communion by George Williams

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GEORGE WILLIAMS

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TO THE MOST BLESSED

CYRIL II.,

PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM, AND OF ALL PALESTINE,

THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED

(BY THE GRACIOUS PERMISSION OF HIS HOLINESS,)

WITH FEELINGS

OF THE DEEPEST REVERENCE, AFFECTION,

AND GRATITUDE.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Correspondence between the Nonjuring Bishops and the Patriarchs of the Eastern Church, which is here published entire for the first time, has been hitherto chiefly known from the full notice of it in Mr Lathbury's *History of the Nonjurors*, in which he has given all the letters of the British Bishops to the Patriarchs and others, but a short summary only of the replies on the part of the Orthodox.

As the Correspondence itself, with Dr Brett's brief Introduction prefixed, will best tell its own tale, and almost defies analysis,—except such as is given in the running table of contents in the headings of the pages,—a few prefatory pages may be best devoted to the more general purpose of indicating the position which this Correspondence occupies in the history of the Divisions of Christendom, and of the attempts to heal them; and of endeavouring to estimate its importance in any future designs to bring about a Reconciliation between the Orthodox Eastern Church and the Churches of the Anglican Communion.

I. It must be distinctly understood then that this was no isolated attempt to establish relations

of Intercommunion with the Orthodox Church, resulting from a spasmodic yearning after the restoration of the broken unity of Christendom. It was one of a series of such efforts, indicating in the Reformed Church of England a painful sense of isolation from the rest of the Catholic family, and, at the same time, testifying, by the very craving, its title to be reckoned as a living member of that family; for in Churches, as in individual souls, "love is life's only sign,"—

"No distance breaks the tie of blood;
 Brothers are brothers evermore;
 Nor wrong, nor wrath of deadliest mood,
 That magic may o'erpower;
 Oft, ere the common source be known,
 The kindred drops will claim their own,
 And throbbing pulses silently
 Move heart towards heart by sympathy¹."

The once popular theory of the Asiatic origin of the British Church has been found to rest on too precarious a foundation to warrant the belief that an Oriental parentage had continued to exercise a conscious influence on the religious feelings and sympathies of its children after its amalgamation into the Latin Communion; but it might well be that the eminent services which an Asiatic Metropolitan in the throne of Canterbury had conferred upon the Early English Church, in consolidating its foundations, edifying it in the unity and purity of the Catholic Faith, and in illumi-

¹ *Christian Year.* Second Sunday after Trinity.

nating it not only with sacred but with secular learning;—that these services, faithfully recorded by Bede, were considered, not only to have laid the Church under a lasting debt of obligation to Theodore of Tarsus, but also to have established a bond of fellowship with the Eastern Church, which the unhappy controversies of later times could not altogether sever.

However this may be, certain it is that in no part of Western Christendom was the reconciliation of East and West, supposed to have been accomplished at Florence, hailed with more joy than in England. The Emperor of the East and the Patriarch of Constantinople were met in Italy by envoys from King Henry VIth, bearing letters of hearty welcome and encouragement¹, couched in no formal terms of cold court etiquette, but in language indicative of the most entire appreciation of the evils and scandals that had resulted from the long estrangement of the great branches of the Christian family, and of the benefits to the cause of truth that might be expected to follow from the approaching reconciliation. “In this most sacred work,” he says, “occasion is given to all the faithful everywhere of great joy and exultation. And for ourselves, we consider that we have been most happily and graciously dealt with: greatly felicitating ourselves, and counting it a special gift of

¹ Bekynton's *Letters*, Nos. ccxxvi. ccxxvii. Vol. II. pp. 77-80; dated Havering, June 30, 1438.

God, that these sacred and happy auspices, to result as we trust in a fruitful accomplishment, should have fallen in our age ; and may we shortly see with our own eyes the most blessed work of this most sacred union brought to the wished-for happy effect, to the honour and praise of the Almighty and Immortal God, and to the amplification and increase of the Christian Name and Religion and Faith." And in a congratulatory letter to the Pope' on the supposed attainment of this happy consummation, he expresses his ineffable joy and his fervent gratitude to God for this restoration of Unity, in language so extravagant that I decline the task of translating it ; as it would appear unreal to all but the very few who have deeply pondered the misery of a divided Christendom, and the blessings that might be anticipated from its Reunion. Immediately on receiving the joyful tidings, he had ordered "public thanksgivings to be offered up, with processions, litanies, and prayers, in all places subject to his dominion ; with all fervour of devotion and rejoicing of the people ; and to be thenceforth continued ." and accordingly we find in the episcopal Registers of this time directions for giving effect to the king's wishes.

The disastrous results of the attempt made at Florence to compass a compromise of religious differences, for purely political purposes, did not

' *Ibid.* No. cexiv. dated Windsor, Oct. 3, 1439, pp. 49-51.

encourage a repetition of the experiment ; and for nearly two centuries the English Church seems to have ignored the very existence of its Eastern sister. It can be no matter of wonder, however it may be of regret, that its earlier Reformers, in endeavouring to carry out their avowed principle of returning to the doctrine and discipline of the early Church, did not take counsel with that Branch of it which professes to have preserved the primitive and apostolic traditions unadulterated, and whose boast it is to have "been crystallizing the old doctrines" while the Roman Church has been "developing new ones". Had they done so, their performance might have corresponded more nearly with their ideal than in some respects it actually does ; and there might have been less of truth and justice in the charge brought against our Reformed Church by her most candid and friendly critics,—of having broken with the past² ; a charge which even the most loyal and dutiful of her children, if they be honest and impartial, as well as competent judges, will not venture to deny.

Yet the omission of the great Church of Constantinople from the sweeping charge of error brought against the other four Patriarchates in the original

¹ I borrow the happy expression from my friend Professor Stubbs's Sermon, *Evil Days*, p. 10. London, 1868.

² I refer especially to my friend Mr Foulkes, *Christendom's Divisions*, 1st Part, pp. 207, 216, 221.