

**TRANSLATIONS OF CHRISTIAN
LITERATURE. SERIES I. GREEK
TEXTS. FIFTY SPIRITUAL
HOMILIES OF ST. MACARIUS THE
EGYPTIAN**

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A. J. MASON & W. J. SPARROW-SIMPSON & W. K. LOWTHER CLARKE

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TRANSLATIONS OF CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

GENERAL EDITORS: W. J. SPARROW-SIMPSON, D.D.,
W. K. LOWTHER CLARKE, B.D.

SERIES I
GREEK TEXTS

FIFTY SPIRITUAL HOMILIES OF
ST. MACARIUS THE EGYPTIAN

Constituenda est ergo nobis dominici schola seruitii . in qua institutione nihil asperum nihil graue nos constituturos speramus . sed et si quid paululum restrictius . . . propter emendationem uitiorum uel conseruationem caritatis processerit, non ilico pauore perterritus refugas uiam salutis, quae non est nisi angusto initio incipienda-processu uero conuersationis et fidei dilatato corde inenarrabili dilectionis dulcedine curritur uia mandatorum dei.

BENEDICTVS.

Fifty Spiritual Homilies
OF
St. Macarius the Egyptian

BY
A. J. MASON, D.D.

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I SHOULD WISH TO CONNECT THIS VOLUME
CONTAINING THOUGHTS BETTER THAN MY OWN
WITH THE NAME OF
VINCENT HENRY STANTON
REGIUS PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY AT CAMBRIDGE
WHOM FOR FIFTY YEARS I HAVE HAD THE PRIVILEGE
OF COUNTING MY CLOSEST FRIEND
IN A LIFE RICH IN FRIENDSHIPS

INTRODUCTION

I. THE AUTHOR

THE name of Macarius (= "Blessed") was a common one among the Christians of the fourth and following centuries, especially in Egypt. Two men of the name stand out as twin giants of the ascetic life of that age and country. They are distinguished from each other as Macarius the Egyptian and Macarius the Alexandrian. An "Egyptian" means one who belonged to the ancient race of Egypt¹—a "Copt"; an Alexandrian means one who belonged to the Greek colony planted in that city. The two were friends and nearly contemporaries, though the Alexandrian was somewhat the younger. The Egyptian Macarius was born about the year 300.

Palladius, Bishop of Helenopolis, friend of St. Chrysostom, and historian of the religious life of the wilderness, begins his account of the two by saying that he hesitates to relate what he has to say of them, lest he should be thought a liar, so great and wonderful was their history. Palladius was not personally acquainted with the Egyptian. He says that he knew the Alexandrian, but that the other died a year before his own entrance into the Nitrian desert, which was about the year 390. But he was familiar with the locality, and with the people who knew the great ascetic.

"First," he says, "I will speak of the Egyptian, who

¹ See note in Feltoe's *Dionysius of Alexandria*, p. 13.

lived to the age of ninety years. Sixty of these he spent in the desert, having retired to it as a young man of thirty. He was gifted with such discernment as to be called 'Age-in-Youth,' because he made such swift progress. At the age of forty he received the grace of conquering evil spirits, and of healings and predictions. He was also admitted to the priesthood."

Palladius proceeds to relate instances of the exercise of these gifts.

"Two disciples accompanied him into the inner desert, called Scetis. One of them served him close at hand, because of those who came to be cured; the other studied in an adjoining cell. In process of time Macarius had a prophetic vision, and said to the man who served him, whose name was John, 'Hearken to me, brother John, and bear with my admonition. Thou art in temptation; and the spirit of covetousness tempts thee. I have seen it; and I know that if thou hearest with me, thou wilt be perfected in this place, and wilt be glorified, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. But if thou shalt neglect to hear me, upon thee shall come the end of Gehazi, with whose disease thou art afflicted.' It came to pass after the death of Macarius, indeed fifteen or twenty years after, that he neglected the warning. He used for himself what belonged to the poor, and was so covered with elephantiasis that no whole spot could be found on his body on which a finger could be put. This was the prophecy of Macarius . . . [Macarius] was said to be continually in trance, and to spend far more time with God than in things below."

Palladius then tells a curious story of a man whose wife had been bewitched and turned to all appearance into a mare. The man bridled her and took her to Macarius. The brethren standing near the cell rebuked him for bringing the animal; but Macarius said to them, "Horses you

are, and have horses' eyes. It is a woman, and only transformed to the eyes of those who are deceived."

"And he blessed water," the narrative continues, "and poured it over the naked woman's head, and prayed over her, and immediately made her appear a woman to everybody. Then he gave her some food, and made her eat it, and sent her away, thanking the Lord, in her own husband's company. And he gave her this advice: 'Never miss going to church. Never be away from communion. This happened to you because for five weeks you had not gone to the mysteries.'

"Another feature of his asceticism. He made an underground passage from his cell, half a furlong in length, and constructed a cave at the end of it. This took him a long time. If too many people troubled him, he would slip secretly out of the cell, and go into the cave, where nobody could find him. One of his devoted disciples told me the story, and said that on the way to the cave he would say four-and-twenty prayers, and four-and-twenty on the way back."

Palladius adds that he was said to have brought a dead man back to life, in order to convince some one who would not believe in the resurrection;¹ and that on one occasion he healed a boy of strangely disordered appetite, which was attributed to a particular species of devil. When the affliction stopped, Macarius asked the mother how much she wished the boy to eat. She answered, "Ten pounds of bread." Macarius told her it was too much; and, fasting and praying over him for a week, he allowed him to eat three pounds, and sent him back to work.²

Palladius had been the disciple of Evagrius Ponticus, who had in turn been a disciple to the two Macarii. The account of these two masters given by Evagrius himself has been in part incorporated by Socrates in the fourth

¹ The story is told at great length by Cassian, *Coll.* XV. 3.

² *Historia Lausiaca*, ed. Butler, p. 43 ff.