

The Ethiopic Liturgy.

THE attention of Christendom is being directed in these days as never before towards the ancient Church of Ethiopia, and whatever our views as to the present deplorable Italo-Abyssinian war we cannot refuse our sympathy to our fellow-Christians of the ancient Ethiopic Church. That Church has an interest and a glamour all its own. Sixteen centuries old, and for most of its history isolated from the rest of Christendom—a pathetic island in the sea of Paganism and Islam which surrounds it—it has the charm of the mysterious and the remote. It emerges into history about the year 340, when Frumentius was consecrated Bishop of the Ethiopians by Athanasius at Alexandria. Ever since, the Ethiopic Metropolitan has received his appointment from Egypt, and the traditions and Liturgy of his Church have followed the Coptic model with interesting local variations. From the middle of the fifth century the Ethiopic Church, like the Coptic, has been Monophysite, but Monophysitism has left no apparent trace in its Liturgy, which in its main features reproduces the distinguishing marks of all Eastern rites, namely the rejection of the dogma of the double procession of the Holy Ghost, indicated by the omission of the Filioque clause in the Creed, and the Consecration of the Elements by the Epiklesis or Invocation of the Holy Ghost.

At one period Jesuit Missionaries succeeded in temporarily imposing the Roman obedience on the Ethiopic Church, but this was fiercely resented by the people and gave rise to devastating civil wars. The Emperor had conformed to Rome, but after one battle, which resulted in much bloodshed, it is reported that his son said to him: "This is not a victory over Moslems or heathens, but over our own flesh and blood, our fellow-subjects, our fellow-Christians. We destroy ourselves to put a sword into our enemies' hands. They need not slay us; they need only leave the work of extermination to ourselves." Shortly afterwards the Emperor issued a famous proclamation to his people: "We formerly gave you the Roman faith, believing it to be true; but innumerable multitudes of my people having

been slain on that account we do therefore restore the religion of your fathers to you, so that your priests are to take possession of their Churches again and officiate therein as formerly." The proclamation was greeted with shouts of "Let the Alexandrian faith flourish!" That was in 1632, and since then the Ethiopic Church has remained faithful to its old allegiance, nor does it seem likely that the events of the present time, whatever their political outcome may be, will succeed in commending the Latin obedience to a people who can hardly do other than associate it with the bombs and poison-gas with the help of which Western civilisation is pressing once more upon them.

As one might expect from its centuries of isolation, the Ethiopic Church has many features peculiar to itself, and doubtless in many respects it has grown corrupt. Holy Communion is celebrated daily, but at different hours, ranging from midnight to 3 p.m. Circumcision is practised, and precedes Baptism. Some of the rites of the Church are accompanied by ritual dancing and other features strange to a Western eye. The Calendar of Saints includes the name of Pontius Pilate. The service of Easter Eve is said to be of peculiar beauty. It culminates in the Priest's bending over a flower-strewn bier in the centre of the Church, and calling softly, as though to one sleeping: "Jesus—Jesus—Jesus!" And after a pause comes the glad Easter greeting—"Christ is risen!"

Few scholars have the necessary knowledge of the Ethiopic language, particularly of its ancient form in which the Liturgy is written, to have engaged in much research into the history and ritual of this ancient Church. There is said to be still an abundance of unexamined manuscript material throughout the churches and monasteries of the land, and it is a melancholy thought that much of this material may have been lost for ever in the last few weeks, sacrificed to the fire and sword of an invading Christian power. One form of the Liturgy is translated in Brightman's "Liturgies Eastern and Western," and the whole subject has been given exhaustive treatment in the Hale Lectures (1915) of Dr Samuel Mercer of Chicago. In his volume entitled "The Ethiopic Liturgy" he traces the history of the rite, and, using more manuscript material than Brightman, gives a detailed analysis of it, together with a literal translation and a photographic reproduction of a manuscript original. For what follows I have made use of Dr Mercer's translation and notes, which are of great value, although not a

few points of interest are left unannotated. Dr Mercer's object, however, has been largely to prepare the field for other scholars, and there is obviously a large amount of interesting work waiting to be done, not only as regards the Liturgy itself but also in the wider field of the other services of the Church, concerning which almost nothing seems to be known to Western students.

The Alexandrian family of Liturgies to which the Ethiopic belongs has certain features of its own. There are no variable prayers, the only variable elements being lessons and occasional hymns. A very prominent part is assigned to the Deacon, who is frequently reciting his own part of the service while the chief celebrant is saying quite different words. The service is very long and loosely constructed, particularly in the first or pro-anaphoral portion. There are four lessons, not the Law, Prophets, Epistle and Gospel of primitive use, but the "warrant" from I. Corinthians, a lection from the "Catholic" Epistles, one from the Acts of the Apostles, and finally the Gospel. The "great" Intercession comes generally before the Consecration. The Ethiopic rite, however, developed on its own lines after the establishment of the Ethiopic Church. Like all Eastern Churches, it translated the Liturgy into its vernacular from the beginning, and this original translation of the Alexandrian Liturgy of S. Mark naturally began to develop national features. The prolonged isolation of the country from its Christian neighbours due to the Moslem conquests would of course heighten the tendency towards national idiosyncrasy. One unique feature of the rite is that it alone gives us the prayers said by the Ministers during their acts of preparation before the actual commencement of the Liturgy, while the influence of the documents known as the "Ethiopic Church Order" and the "Testamentum Domini" is uniquely evident.

The long prayers of preparation contain passages of great beauty. Before the withdrawing of the veil the Minister says: "Lord our God, who knowest the thought of man and triest the heart, forasmuch as, although I am not worthy, Thou hast called me to minister in this holy place, disdain me not nor turn away Thy face from me, but take sin away from me and purify the uncleanness of my soul and my body. Thrust me not away and make me not ashamed of my hope, but send down upon me the dew of Thy pity, the grace of the Holy Ghost, and make me meet to stand in Thy sanctuary, that I may offer unto Thee a pure

oblation with an humble heart for the remission of sin and error." Over the altar linen is said this prayer: "Lord, our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, to whom belong treasures which are full of loving-kindness and mercy, O Giver of good things to all who trust in Him, who did spread out the heavens by His wisdom and gave a diverse law to the firmaments and the clouds and the sky, the line whereof hath not changed; now also, our God, Thou Lover of man, send down Thine hand and the power of Thy god-head upon these cloths which shall be wrapped about and which shall cover Thine holy Body." At this point there occurs an unique address to the people, apparently designed to exhort them not to leave the Church without communicating: "O my brother, who art in thy sin, and who prayest for compassion that thou mayest receive the Host, go not forth from the Church when the sacrifice is offered, and when they offer on thy behalf do not leave the priest to go out, and when they offer on thy behalf do not depart with those who are not baptised, but remain in the Church and listen to the words of the priest, and hear the petition for the remission of thy sins and the sins of all men. He who remains and asks compassion for himself shall be saved. Now how wilt thou be refined if thou wanderest from land to land in thine heart, when there is no sign that thou art of the sealed by the heavenly bride of Christ? Wouldst thou alone go forth from the Church and shut its door upon thee, that thou mayest not attain to eternity?"

After the Ministers have vested there comes an interesting and beautiful little prayer showing how completely the service is dominated by the belief that the consecration is effected by the Holy Ghost: "How awful is this day and how marvellous this house, wherein the Holy Ghost will come down from the high heaven and overshadow this oblation and hallow it. In quietness, in fear, and in trembling stand ye up, and pray that His peace be with me and with all of you." Then follows a series of prayers said over the paten, the chalice, and the other altar furnishings. They are not properly consecration prayers, for the Liturgy has not yet really commenced, but they have something of the nature of consecration about them. Over the paten is said: "Our God, who said unto Moses in Mount Sinai, Make me a choice vessel and set it in the tabernacle; now also stretch forth Thine holy right hand upon the *masob* (pot which contains the hosts) and fill it with power and virtue, and the grace of the Holy Ghost

and Thy glory, that they may make therein the body of thine only Holy Son in this holy Apostolic Church." A direct prayer to our Lord is offered over the chalice: "Christ, our very God, our Lord, who wentest to the marriage feast when they called Thee in Cana of Galilee, and didst bless them and didst make the water wine, also in like manner do Thou unto this wine which is set before Thee; bless it and hallow it and cleanse it; let it become the joy and life of our soul and our body."

Early in the Liturgy proper there is an interesting prayer for those who have brought offerings to the Church, a prayer which obviously has in view the widow's mite as well as more splendid offerings: "We pray and beseech Thee for those who bring an offering within the one holy Catholic Church, an oblation, first fruits, tithes, a thank-offering, a memorial, in secret or openly, whether much or little, and for those who wish to give and have not wherewith to give. Thine acceptance of their ready mind grant Thou unto all of them." Then comes the "Deacon's Litany," to which there are familiar parallels in all the Eastern rites, after which is the solemn "Little Entrance" of the Holy Scriptures, which begins with the blessing of incense and the censuring of the Church. A prayer for the peace of the Church, set in this part of the rite, reads with peculiar pathos to-day: how well one can imagine it coming from the anguished heart of the people as they meet day by day just now in their little round Churches, not knowing how soon destruction may blaze down on them. The Deacon says: "Pray for the peace of the Church, one, holy, apostolic, orthodox in the Lord": and the Priest responds: "Remember, O Lord, the honoured Father, our Archpope, and all orthodox bishops, presbyters, and deacons. *And if he, the Archpope, be entered into rest he shall say,* Rest, O Lord, the soul of our father and make him to dwell in the kingdom of heaven with Thy righteous servants; seat for us on his throne in his stead a good shepherd, and let us not be like a flock having no shepherd, and let not the ravenous wolf make ravin of us, nor alien folk that are contrary to us reproach us. Arise, O Lord, and let Thine enemies be scattered, and let all those that hate Thine holy and blessed name flee before Thee, but let Thy people who do Thy will be blessed with blessings."

The first lection, as has been said, is that so familiar to us in our Scottish use, the words of S. Paul to the Corinthians concerning the sacrament. They are regarded with the

greatest veneration, and are preceded by a prayer for understanding: "Lord of knowledge and declarer of wisdom, who hast revealed to us what was hidden in the depth of darkness, giver of a word of gladness to those who proclaim the greatness of Thy power; Thou it was who of Thy great goodness didst call Paul, who was a persecutor, and didst make him a chosen vessel, and wast well pleased with him that he should become an Apostle, and a preacher of the gospel of Thy kingdom and a herald, O Christ our God. Thou art a Lover of man. O Good One: vouchsafe us a mind without distraction, and a pure understanding that departeth not from Thee, that we may both perceive and know how great is Thine holy teaching, which is now read to us out of him; and as he was like to Thee, O Prince of Life, so make us also to be like unto him in deed and in faith, and to praise Thine holy name, and to glory in Thy precious cross at all times."

The other lections are likewise introduced by appropriate prayers, the reading of the Gospel being invested with the greatest solemnity. It is preceded by the singing of the Trisagion, by the offering of incense, and by this prayer, said by the Priest with his face turned towards the Gospel: "Lord, our God and our Saviour, Lover of mankind, who didst send Thy messengers to propagate Thy holiness and to announce Thy purity in all ends of the world, now, O Lord, send upon us Thy light and Thy righteousness, and illuminate the eyes of our heart and our understanding, and make us meet to hear with fortitude the word of Thy holy Gospel; not only that we may hear, but that we may also do; that Thou mayest hear us, that we may bear good fruit, thirty-fold and sixty-fold and an hundred, for the sins of us Thy people, who pray for the kingdom of heaven." There is, it need hardly be said, very much in these Oriental rites which makes no appeal to us of the Reformed tradition, but in view of the casual and inadequate manner in which the Holy Scriptures are too often read in our Churches to-day, we may surely derive some lessons for ourselves from the exceeding reverence and solemnity with which the Word of God is received by our brethren of the Eastern Churches. There are appropriate endings to the Gospel, according to the evangelist from whom it is taken: S. Matthew—"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away, said the Lord to His disciples." S. Mark—"He who hath ears to hear, let him hear." S. Luke—"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one

tittle of the law and the prophets to fail, said the Lord to His disciples." S. John—"He who believeth on the Son hath everlasting life."

A further litany occurs at this point, with, amongst many other petitions, these: "Remember, Lord, the seed and the fruit of the fields; make them abundant. Remember, Lord, the sweetness of the airs and the fruits of the earth; bless them. Remember, Lord, the safety of man and beast. Remember, Lord, the catechumens of Thy people, and teach them and stablish them in the right faith; banish from their heart all remains of idolatry; stablish in their heart Thy law and the fear of Thee; grant them to know the certainty of the word wherein they have been instructed; and make them all meet for the new birth and for the remission of their sin, and prepare them to be a tabernacle for Thine Holy Ghost." This is the end of the Liturgy of the Catechumens, who are now bidden go forth.

The Lavabo and the Kiss of Peace open the Liturgy of the Faithful and then the Creed is said, without the Filioque. There is one standard Anaphora in the Ethiopic rite, though there are no fewer than fourteen used on special occasions. In the standard form the Sursum Corda is followed immediately by the Great Intercession. The Sanctus, which has no Benedictus following, is introduced in peculiar fashion. Immediately after the Intercessions the Priest says: "Unto Thee before whom stand a thousand thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand, the holy angels and Thine honourable creatures that have six wings, the seraphim and the cherubim: With two of their wings they cover their face, with two of their wings they cover their feet, and with two of their wings they fly from end to end of the world: Continually, therefore, as they all hallow Thee and praise, with all those who hallow Thee and praise Thee, receive our hallowing also which we utter unto Thee,

Holy, holy, holy"

The recital of the words of Institution comes next, the priest breaking the bread into five parts, though not separating the parts, and shaking the cup, and then follows the Epiklesis: "Now also, Lord, remembering Thy death and Thy resurrection, we confess Thee, and offer unto Thee this bread and this cup, giving thanks unto Thee, and thereby Thou hast made us meet to stand before Thee and do Thee priestly service. We pray Thee, O Lord, and beseech Thee, that Thou wouldst send Thy Holy Ghost and power upon this bread and upon this cup. May He make it for

the body and blood of our Lord and our God and our Saviour Jesus Christ for ever and ever." In the recital of the words of Institution there is an important variation from all other Liturgies. Instead of "This is my body" we have "This bread is my body." There has been much controversy as to whether this implies on the part of the Ethiopic Church a disbelief in any change in the elements, but there seems no doubt, regarding the service as a whole, that the Ethiopic position on this question is the same as that of all the other Oriental Churches.

After prayers of penitence and further intercession we come to the Manual Acts and the Communion. The words of delivery are as follows: With the bread—"This is the body, holy, true, of our Lord and our Saviour and our God, Jesus Christ, which is given for life and for salvation, unto those who partake of it in faith." With the cup—"This is the blood, precious, true, of our Lord and God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, which is given for life and for salvation and for remission of sin unto those who receive it in faith." In giving the Communion the Priest makes three short declarations of his faith (1) as to the true Manhood of our Lord, (2) as to the indivisibility of his Manhood and Godhead, and (3) as to the real presence of the Lord in the consecrated elements. We come now to one of the most interesting prayers of the rite. It is apparently intended to be said by the communicant as he receives, though this appears difficult if not impossible, and it contains a long expression of belief. It is left unannotated by Dr Mercer, although many things in it call for explanation. I give its closing words: "We say that marriage is pure and undefiled and not unclean, for God created them Adam and Eve that they might multiply people. We say, therefore, that He is our body and soul, for He did not die and did not repudiate the body . . . Again, we believe that Christ was not nurtured of woman and was not mated; but it was the Word of God which became Man in righteousness, and he alone joined man with God, a high-priesthood of His Father. He was not circumcised, as were the Jews. We believe that He came to fulfil Scripture, the prophets, and all which promised His coming to the people; Jesus Christ who sprang from the Jews, from the Branch of Isaiah, the power of the blood of his shoulder, to Him be honour and praise, and power, both now and ever and world without end." This prayer raises several problems, the reference to the circumcision being specially strange.

Prayers of thanksgiving bring the service to an end. It is a service full of interest and with not a few beauties. Like all the Eastern rites it seems to us of prodigious length, and there is certainly a good deal of mere repetition in it, but here and there are to be found passages which might well find some place in our own public devotions. And one cannot but be struck anew with the fact that, in spite of repetition and enlargement which seem to us unnecessary, in spite of local peculiarities of outlook and phrase, in spite of an underlying doctrine of the Real Presence which is not our doctrine, there is yet a wonderful residuum of identity between this ancient East African rite and our own simpler service of the Lord's Table. Everything essential is to be found in both, and the very order of the different acts is similar. It is much to be desired that our own liturgiologists should give more attention to the sacred books of an ancient Christian people now suffering destruction and death at Christian hands.

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