

For Private Circulation only.

THE ANGLICAN
AND
COPTIC COMMUNIONS
IN EGYPT.

By a Member of the C.M.S. Mission to Moslems.

• • •

PRINTED AT
THE NILE MISSION PRESS,
BULAC ROAD,
CAIRO

• • •

PREFACE* BY THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

I WAS much interested in the Copts when I was in the Soudan and in Egypt, and am very glad to write a few words of Preface to this little account of them and their relation to the Anglican Church.

They were represented by some of their leading Bishops at the consecration of Khartoum Cathedral; I was received by a deputation from them at every place I visited; the aged Patriarch himself received me in Cairo, and one of the most striking services we had in Egypt was one attended by some 2,000 young Copts in the Coptic Cathedral in Cairo, the great feature of which to my mind was a speech made on the spur of the moment, in Arabic, by Mr. Gairdner of the C.M.S. staff in Cairo, at my request, after I had myself sat down.

All idea that the Copts are in any real sense "heretics" may be laid aside. Whatever may be the facts in the past, they have suffered and endured more for the Catholic Faith for hundreds of years than any of us have done, and they greatly need our sympathy and practical help.

This it is very difficult to give, chiefly for political reasons. They are about 1 to 13 of the population, which is otherwise Moslem, and rather naturally look to the sympathy of their fellow-Christians to secure their political rights.

* Owing to a perfect chapter of accidents the receipt of this preface was delayed and the pamphlet had to be made up at the Press without it. We have the pleasure now of inserting it as an inset.

But it is fatal to bring politics into a purely religious question, and not fair to those who have the very difficult task of governing Egypt.

Now the C.M.S. seemed to me to have hit upon exactly the right policy with regard to the Copts. They do not attempt to convert their members and make what we might call a "C.M.S. Church of their own," nor do they allow the Copts to use them for political purposes.

They offer themselves to the Copts as spiritual brothers; they do all they can to foster the spiritual life in the Coptic Church, to help the younger men especially to read and understand the Bible, and to make them into a more living instrument for the Holy Spirit to use.

They have achieved the first step. They have won their confidence. Nothing could exceed the friendly feeling existing between Bishop Gwynne and the Copts in the Soudan, or between Canon Mac Innes, Mr. Gairdner and Mr. McNeile and the Copts in Cairo.

It is for us at home to back up our brethren in the difficult task they have undertaken, to supply them with the recruits for the work they will undoubtedly need as the work advances, and so revive the spiritual life and missionary zeal of one of the oldest branches of the Christian Church.

A. F. LONDON.

EASTER, 1912.

FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION ONLY.

The Anglican and Coptic Communions in Egypt.

By a Member of the C.M.S. Mission to Moslems.

SO much interest has invariably been displayed by those who have conversed with C.M.S. missionaries in Egypt on the above subject that it has occurred to us—in response to more than one request—to put down some notes, the object of which is to illustrate the ways in which the Coptic Church comes into practical touch with our own.

About the history of the Coptic church we need hardly speak. But we should like just to emphasize how *completely* it has represented Egyptian Christianity up to the nineteenth century. For after Chalcedon the whole of the Egyptians (as distinguished from Greek residents, etc.) broke away from the main body of the Eastern Church. The latter of course claimed the true succession of the Alexandrian Patriarchate; but from that day to this those Patriarchs (of the Melkite or “Greek Orthodox” succession) have been foreigners shepherding a foreign flock in the land of Egypt. From that day all Egyptians followed the Jacobite succession of Patriarchs, and formed the to *them* “Orthodox,” to the Church-history books “heretical,” because Monophysite, Church of Egypt. In the nineteenth century Copts may have broken away and formed Roman and

Presbyterian communions; but to this day there is not a Copt to be found in all Egypt, we believe, in communion with the "Greek," the main body of the Eastern Church.

About the present state of the Coptic church we may say just a few words. The opening of Egypt to new influences, both educational and spiritual, in the nineteenth century naturally did not leave the Coptic church untouched. After thirteen centuries of isolation, neglect, and persecution, the church had admittedly sunk to a very low level indeed, from every point of view. The present revival within the church is owed partly to greater general enlightenment, but far more to direct religious stimulus from without. The share of the Anglican communion in rendering this service is to be described in this paper. But the reflex action from the work of the American Presbyterian missionaries has been enormously great. These missionaries began their work without any intention to proselytise. Circumstances, however, proved too strong, and the result of the strong evangelistic and educational work of this mission has been to raise up a thriving community with churches everywhere, from Assuan to Alexandria. All this, though naturally resented by the Copts, has without any question benefited them incalculably: for in the first place, many of them have thereby perceived that their only possible defence is the reform and enlightenment of their own community; and in the second, great numbers of them have attended presbyterian schools and preachings, and confessedly owe their personal religious life to the same.

Such men, where they remain faithful to the old mother-church, become the leaders of the reform movement within their own. A few of their numbers may be

found among the clergy; more among the diaconate and official preachers (*wu"âz*) of the church; most of all among the laity. The clergy are the most backward and of the clergy, the episcopate. Owing to certain unfortunate church traditions, to which, still more unfortunately, an authority as binding as the divine law is apparently attached, both Patriarch and all the Bishops must be chosen from the monastic order, a fact which all too nearly ensures lowness of social origin, want of education, reactionary conservatism, ignorance of practical affairs, and blindness to the crying and imperative needs of the church, on the part of their leaders. The same ecclesiastical tradition has placed the rich funds of the church in their hands. For these they are responsible neither to the government, nor to the church, nor even to one another. No audit is demanded, and no account kept; and it is notorious that enormous sums of money go every year no one knows where. The evil effect of this one thing on the whole church, from more than the merely financial view-point, can be imagined.

The consequence, of course, is that in spite of the pious religious character of many—unfortunately not of all—of these Bishops, their combined influence is reactionary; all the more in that they are at present led by the admittedly evil genius of the Coptic church to-day, an able but worldly-minded person, who has completely under his thumb the aged Patriarch, a man of blameless life, but stubborn and reactionary, and now of failing powers. Conflicts are always occurring between these officials and the reforming laity. The extremely secular character of many of these latter, which is the result of the past and present backwardness of the church, greatly weakens their own cause. The reform-

ing zeal of such men is largely limited to finance, a fact which in this country exposes it to suspicion. The lower clergy mostly partake in the backwardness of the higher, especially in the villages, and reform here is difficult owing to the impossibility hitherto experienced of improving the training of the candidates for the ministry to any effective extent. The genuine reformers within the church are a comparatively small number of laity, chiefly younger men,* who have real religious life and experience, and desire the revival and not merely the "reform" of their church. Yet in their case, too, earnest effort has to reckon with the inexperience, the ignorant suspicion and fear of anything new, too often the sheer unspirituality, of those who ought to be the leaders of the church. Those who take the initiative, consequently, only rarely find themselves earnestly and actively supported—never led—by them; while very often they are suspected, intrigued against, thwarted and stifled. At the present moment, for example, the vitally-important matter of religious education in the Government schools finds the authorities at the Patriarchate lukewarm, or rather cold; and it has been carried on in the teeth of their hardly-concealed indifference and suspicion!

We need hardly say that these are they who make the Coptic-Anglican entente still imperfect, and render it necessary for Anglican workers in this country still to walk with circumspection. Nevertheless, we have found these last years everywhere and in all quarters a wonderful improvement in respect of this matter; and the belief is slowly, but surely, gaining ground in all sections of the Coptic community—apart from the

* We may reckon among them the deacons, who are in some respects more to be grouped with the laity than with the clergy.

ignorant or malevolent clique that is antipathetic to all progress as such—that the Anglican church is to be trusted as the true friend of the Copts.

With this sketch of present conditions we may pass to our brief account of what our church has done or is doing for the Copts.

We do not know whether the Coptic-Anglican entente has any history previous to 1825, when it was inaugurated by the C.M.S. missionary the Rev. J. R. T. Lieder, who was sent out to do what he could to bring the Gospel to Moslems in Egypt. The difficulty, or the next-to-impossibility of doing much in this direction made it all the more obvious to him that he ought to do what he could to help the old national church of the country; and therefore, in accordance with the invariable instructions and declared policy of the C.M.S. in regard to Eastern Churches, he carried on for many years a valuable work exactly on the lines of the Archbishop's Mission to the Nestorians.* By diffusing literature, by holding a theological class for candidates for the ministry, by promoting education, and by heartily backing the efforts of the great reforming Patriarch Kyrillus IV., who was probably murdered by the Government in 1862, and whose 50th anniversary has just been celebrated by the Copts throughout Egypt, Lieder sought to elevate the whole community and to make it more efficient as an instrument to reach Islam. Lieder's long term of service in Egypt terminated in 1862, and the mission was unfortunately withdrawn. Probably no one was aware how much good had really been done. Effects of it crop up to this day. The finest layman in the Coptic Church to-day, the best-known member of the most

* Any apparent deviations from this line have been literally forced on the C.M.S., and not instituted by the Society. The true attitude and intent of the C.M.S. in relation to Eastern Churches is reflected in its history in Egypt.

sterling Christian family in the country, told us that he owed all his religion, under God, to his father, who was one of those who had most come under Lieder's direct influence. And apart from concrete instances of this sort, both the fact and the general character of Lieder's work are remembered for good to-day. Quite recently the venerable old Patriarch mentioned it to us with gratitude. Evidently in his mind it was that mission that struck the note which set the tone permanently for Coptic-Anglican relations in this land.

When the C.M.S. vacated the field the American U.P. Mission entered it, and their work speedily developed along the lines which have already been indicated.

After the Occupation in 1883, the C.M.S. claimed the right to re-enter the country in order to do direct work among Moslems. It may be said that it is fidelity to this calling that enables the C.M.S. Mission to fill so delicate a position among the various bodies of Egyptian Christians, and in particular to keep the confidence and friendship of the Copts.

We may perhaps here just finish off this special aspect of the subject.—During the past ten years overtures from individual Copts to the C.M.S. to join our communion have been frequent, and several applications even from whole communities have been received, to say nothing of invitations to extend our work into such centres as Assiut. In regard to such overtures from communities an absolutely deaf ear has been turned; and in at least one case the refusal has resulted in an extraordinary spontaneous movement towards reform and revival on the part of the very priest and the congregation who made the application, they remaining on, without any break, in the bosom of their own community.

As for individuals, they also are referred back to their own community; and if they insist in attending Anglican services (Arabic) they are given to understand that they are received as honoured guests, not as members. The only actual members of Arabic-Anglican congregations in Egypt are those who after long association with the C.M.S. in actual work among Moslems have become gradually, and inevitably, attached to the corporate life of our Church. (The same may be said about workers drawn from the U.P. community). This, however, makes no difference to the way the C.M.S. is regarded by the Copts. Throughout Egypt it is known as their friend and helper. In a word, it is known that the Arabic section of the Anglican communion in Egypt (*i.e.* the C.M.S.) is fundamentally of and for converts from Islam.

Consequently all work done by our missionaries in Egypt among the Copts is of the nature of a *parergon*. And just to this it owes the fact that the opportunities for helpfulness are so numerous, incessant, and important.

Other relations between the two churches have also been uniformly cordial and helpful. We would enumerate here

(1) The letters of greeting from the last Lambeth Conference, and other similar official letters from the highest quarter in England.

(2) The services rendered by the Jerusalem and the East mission; for example, the valued official visits of the Bishop of Jerusalem to the Patriarch whenever he comes to Cairo; the invariable kindness and the solid services rendered by the late Bishop of Salisbury,—an instance of which was the help and hospitality he gave in 1910 to an earnest young Coptic deacon who had just

initiated a most important work among students and school-boys in Cairo: the fruitful residence of Canon Oldfield in Assuan, Sohag, etc.

(3) The valuable ministry of the late Dean Butcher, and even more of Mrs. Butcher, who became herself the historian of the Coptic church, and whose sympathy and services to the old national communion have been intensely appreciated.

(4) The strong and special cordiality of the relations subsisting in Khartoum; begun by the Rev. Lt. Gwynne while still a C.M.S. missionary and (afterwards) Army Chaplain, and continued more powerfully than ever after his elevation to the episcopate. The consecrations of the two cathedrals gave occasion for an exchange of affectionate courtesies that were very much more than formal and official, that were in fact significant and personal to a high degree. The two Bishops are personal friends, and the same may be said of the respective clergy. While as for the Coptic laity, they have for thirteen years had a second pastor in Bishop Gwynne, who has fostered their religious life in every way.

(5) The recent visit of the Lord Bishop of London, which brought out the brotherliness established during all these years by the means already described and those still to be mentioned, besides making a very special contribution of its own.

It will be realized that the greater part of the effort mentioned under the last five heads was put forth by those who were confined to the use of the English tongue. If the C.M.S. missionaries are able to supplement such efforts, this fact is due to the incessant opportunities they have of associating with Copts of all grades from the Patriarch downwards, and conversing with them in their native Arabic. We may enumerate some of the

chief ways in which we seem to have been able to help these Christian brethren.

(1) The C.M.S. village mission to Menufiya (the province just north of Cairo) is able to receive support from and give it to the village priests whom it meets. This is both fortunate and remarkable, for the village priests are often the most difficult of all to deal with, being full of the prejudice that is simply the result of ignorance, and is for that reason all the stronger and more irrational, thereby tending to create the very thing it fears. Moreover, the Coptic Ordinary of that diocese happens to be the prelate already alluded to above, a man who thwarts every good work within his own communion, and who has therefore naturally behaved very badly to C.M.S. workers in no very distant times. (All this did not prevent the said prelate from being the official spokesman of the greetings of the Coptic church when the Lord Bishop of London paid his state visit to the Patriarch, and from reading a beautiful address and emphasizing the perfect relations subsisting between the two "sisters." We shall not fail to make use of this circumstance in our subsequent dealings with this *difficile* ecclesiastic!).

(2) The Rev. D. M. Thornton's evangelistic tours in Upper Egypt are well-known to many. During these tours he very greatly strengthened the hand of the Copts in the southern dioceses in every way. Other C.M.S. clergy have subsequently made similar visits, using the Copts to effect an entrance for Moslem work (an unusual experience for the former!). They several times preached in Coptic churches during these tours. On one occasion when one of them had to minister to the English community in one provincial town, the Coptic Bishop lent the church for the early celebration. It fol-

lowed the early Coptic *quddâs*, which the Anglican clergyman attended in his vestments, preaching after the Nicene Creed and afterwards standing within the sanctuary;—thereafter celebrating the Holy Communion according to our Anglican rite on the same altar.*

(3) In regard to the vital matter of religious instruction in the Government Primary Schools, the C.M.S. clergy were able to render good service. They were granted certain important interviews in high places, and to their mediation the Copts rightly or wrongly ascribe very largely the subsequent granting of the desired facilities. Lately, when the Government took a certain step in this matter which has appeared to threaten this valued privilege, the head of the Coptic clerical school with a member of his staff came over to the C.M. House and besought us to get to work again in the matter, saying, "You know, we consider that this work originated here; therefore it must be saved from here." It may well be that they attribute an exaggerated influence to our missionaries' intervention in the first instance; but the words at least show the mind of the speaker and those for whom he spoke.

When the facilities were granted, the Copts asked the C.M.S. missionaries to draw up a plan and a syllabus for them, and this was done. Repeatedly they have been consulted in regard to the appointment of English teachers and heads of Coptic educational establishments in recent years.

* In this connection it is of interest that when the C.M.S. clergy were casting about for an office for the introduction of catechumens, one of them chanced to discover that the first part of the Coptic baptismal office was really an office for the introduction of catechumens, evidently of enormous antiquity (for on the face of it are signs which show that it comes down from times when Egypt was still *heathen*, i.e., not later than the VIth Century). For a millenium-and-a-half it has not been used for adults. Now for the first time, in an abridged and adapted form, it is being used by Anglican clergy for the admission of converts from Islam!

(4) The revival in the Coptic church for which we are working must come through that church's young men. With the Bishops and elder clergy we cultivate brotherly relations in every possible way, and it is probable that with the exception of some of the older and more ignorant of them the old, inveterate, and unreasoning suspicious are fast disappearing or have quite disappeared. This suspiciousness is a hereditary temper and attitude of mind rather than anything definite or reasoned, and it may require patience to deal with its residue for many a year still. This is why we feel that the most hopeful and most natural channel along which the spiritual revival must come that alone can save the Coptic church, is the present generation of students and other young men. Wide indeed have been the doors here opened to the C.M.S. workers along this line:—

(a) The movement for religious instruction among primary school-boys has already been mentioned.

(b) We were able to take a leading part in getting an entrance to the Government secondary schools for Basili Butros, the young deacon and devoted voluntary worker already mentioned. A very important Bible-study movement has been the result. This brother accompanied one of our clergy to England and was introduced by him to the leaders of the Student Movement and other religious movements among men and boys, which introductions, with that to the late Lord Bishop of Salisbury, have meant much for his work here in Cairo.

(c) The same may be said for the Christian movement now beginning among the students of the Higher Colleges. This was given a great stimulus by the visit of Dr. Mott in 1911 and by the Egyptian deputation to

the Constantinople Conference the same year; in both of which C.M.S. clergy took a leading part. Two of the latter are on the committee of this incipient "Egyptian Student Movement" as advisory members.

(d) The needs of other young Christian men in Cairo are being faced by a branch of the Y.M.C.A., which though open to all is necessarily predominantly a Coptic society. This was started in 1910 mainly through one of the C.M.S. staff, who now sits on its Committee of Management, as a full member, by the unanimous request of the young men; and they are with the frankest confidence pressing him to take an ever more active and personal part in helping them in their efforts to save and build up Coptic young men, thousands of whom live lives of utter religious indifference and great moral depravity in this city.

The object of the Coptic Anglican entente is, we take it, twofold, (1) to help forward the spiritual revival of the ancient national church of this land; and (2) to help forward the cause of unity in this land. Under both aspects God has given to our communion a unique position, opportunity, and work. And the object of this paper will have been attained if it is used to draw together those interested in the Copts from all sections of the church at home into constant prayer for their representatives in this land, and for this ancient national church in the land of Egypt. We simply cannot exaggerate the need for such effort and prayer,—and far indeed is it from our intention in this paper to give a too optimistic impression of the situation. We regard the latter, indeed, as serious to a degree. The state of

the Copts in the towns is one to cause no congratulation, and scores of Coptic communities in villages all over Egypt are utterly neglected and totally unshepherded. No wonder the leakage to Islam is still going on year after year when one considers that the people in such districts are admitted to be more Moslem than Copt, in customs, in parlance, and even in belief. The past educational policy of the Government and the shameful supineness of the Patriarchate have combined to make the present educated class of the community both religiously and morally indifferent and uninstructed. Few and weak still are the really living elements, *apparently* utterly inadequate to carry out the gigantic task of the revival and reform of the church. Things are certainly brighter than they were a decade ago; but it still needs a miracle of God's grace effectively to save the Coptic church. Oh that our own church might be in ever greater measure an instrument of that grace!

