

MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA

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Table of Contents

<u>THE MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA.....1</u>
<u>THE MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA.....1</u>

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IN the year four hundred and sixteen of the kingdom of the Greeks, that is the fifteenth year of the reign of the sovereign ruler, our lord, Trajan Caesar, in the consulship of Commodus and Cyrus,(2) in the month Ilul, on the fifth day of the month, the day after Lysinus,(3) the judge of the country, had heard the case of Sharbil the priest; as the judge was sitting in his judgment-hall, the Sharirs of the city came before him and said to him: We give information before thine Excellency concerning Barsamya, the leader of the Christians, that he went up to Sharbil, the priest, as he was standing and ministering before the venerable gods, and sent and called him to him secretly, and spoke to him, quoting from the books in which he reads in the church where their congregation meets, and recited to him the belief of the Christians, and said to him, "It is not right for thee to worship many gods, but only one God, and His Son Jesus Christ" until he made him a disciple, and induced him to renounce the gods whom he had formerly worshipped; and by means of Sharbil himself also many have become disciples, and are gone down to the church, and lo! this day they confess Christ; and even Avida, and Nebo,(4) and Barcalba, and Hafsa, honourable and chief persons of the city, have yielded to Sharbil in this. We, accordingly, as Sharirs of the city, make this known before thine Excellency, in order that we may not receive punishment as offenders for not having declared before thine Excellency the things which were spoken in secret to Sharbil by Barsamya the guide of the church. Thine Excellency now knoweth what it is fit to command in respect of this said matter.

And, immediately that the judge heard these things, he sent the Sharirs of the city, and some of his attendants with them, to go down to the church and bring up Barsamya from the church. And they led him and brought him up to the judgment-hall of the judge; and there went up many Christians with him, saying: We also will die with Barsamya, because we too are of one mind with him in respect to the doctrine of which he made Sharbil a disciple, and in all that he spoke to him, and in all the instruction that Sharbil received from him, so that he was persuaded by him, and died for the sake of that which he heard from him.

And the Sharirs of the city came, and said to the judge: Barsamya, as thine Excellency commanded, lo! is standing at the door of the judgment-hall of thy Lordship;(1) and honourable chief-persons of the city, who became disciples along with Sharbil, lo! are standing by Barsamya, and crying out, "We will all die with Barsamya, who is our teacher and guide."

And, when the judge heard those things which the Sharirs of the city had told him, he commanded them to go out and write down the names of the persons who were crying out, "We will die with Barsamya." And, when they went out to write down the names of these persons, those who so cried out were too many for them, and they were not able to write down their names, because they were so many: for the cry kept coming to them from all sides, that they "would die for Christ's sake along with Barsamya."

And, when the tumult of the crowd became great, the Sharirs of the city turned back, and came in to the judge, and said to him: We are not able to write down the names of the persons who are crying aloud outside, because they are too many to be numbered. And the judge commanded that Barsamya should be taken up to

THE MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA

the prison, so that the crowd might be dispersed which was collected together about him, lest through the tumult of the multitude there should be some mischief in the city. And, when he went up the gaol, those who had become disciples along with Sharbil continued with him.

And after many days were passed the judge rose up in the morning and went down to his judgment-hall, in order that he might hear the case of Barsamya. And the judge commanded, and they brought him from the prison; and he came in and stood before him. The officers said: Lo, he standeth before thine Excellency.

The judge said: Art thou Barsamya, who hast been made ruler and guide of the people of the Christians, and didst make a disciple of Sharbil, who was chief-priest of the gods, and used to worship them?

Barsamya said: It is I who have done this, and I do not deny it; and I am prepared to die for the truth of this.

The judge said: How is it that thou wast not afraid of the command of the emperors, so that, when the emperors commanded that every one should sacrifice, thou didst induce Sharbil, when he was standing and sacrificing to the gods and offering incense to them, to deny that which he had confessed, and confess Christ whom he had denied?

Barsamya said: I was assuredly(2) made a shepherd of men, not for the sake of those only who are found, but also for the sake of those who have strayed from the fold of truth, and become food for the wolves of paganism; and, had I not sought to make Sharbil a disciple, at my hands would his blood have been required; and, if he had not listened to me, I should have been innocent of his blood.

The judge said: Now, therefore, since thou hast confessed that it was thou that madest Sharbil a disciple, at thy hands will I require his death; and on this account it is right that thou rather than he shouldest be condemned before me, because by thy hands he has died the horrible deaths of grievous tortures for having abandoned the command of the emperors and obeyed thy words.

Barsamya said: Not to my words did Sharbil become a disciple, but to the word of God which He spoke: "Thou shalt not worship images and the likenesses of men." And it is not I alone that am content to die the death of Sharbil for his confession of Christ, but also all the Christians, members of the Church, are likewise eager for this, because they know that they will secure their salvation before God thereby.

The judge said: Answer me not in this manner, like Sharbil thy disciple, lest thine own torments be worse than his; but promise that thou wilt sacrifice before the gods on his behalf.

Barsamya said: Sharbil, who knew not God, I taught to know Him: and dost thou bid me, who have known God from my youth, to renounce God? God forbid that I should do this thing!

The judge said: Ye have made the whole creation disciples of the teaching of Christ; and lo! they renounce the many gods whom the many worshipped. Give up this way of thinking,(3) lest I make those who are near tremble at thee as they behold thee to-day, and those also that are afar off as they hear of the torments to which thou art condemned.

Barsamya said: If God is the help of those who pray to Him, who is he that can resist them? Or what is the power that can prevail against them? Or thine own threats what can they do to them: to men who, before thou give commandment concerning them that they shall die, have their death already set before their eyes, and are expecting it every day?

The judge said: Bring not the subject of Christ before my judgment-seat; but, instead of this, obey the command of the emperors, who command to sacrifice to the gods. Barsamya said: Even though we should not

THE MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA

lay the subject of Christ before thee, yet the sufferings of Christ are portrayed indelibly(1) in the worshippers of Christ; and, even more than thou hearkenest to the commands of the emperors, do we Christians hearken to the commands of Christ the King of kings.

The judge said: Lo! thou hast obeyed Christ and worshipped him up to his day: henceforth obey the emperors, and worship the gods whom the emperors worship.

Barsamya said: How canst thou bid me renounce that in which I was born? when lo! thou didst exact punishment for this at the hand of Sharbil, and saidst to him: Why hast thou renounced the paganism in which thou wast born, and confessed Christianity to which thou wast a stranger? Lo! even before I came into thy presence thou didst thyself give testimony on the matter beforehand, and saidst to Sharbil: The Christians, to whom thou art gone over, do not renounce that in which they were born, but continue in it. Abide, therefore, by the word, which thou hast spoken.

The judge said: Let Barsamya be scourged, because he has rebelled against the command of the emperors, and has caused those also who were obedient to the emperors to rebel with him.

And, when he had been scourged by five men, he said to him: Reject not the command of the emperors, nor insult the emperors' gods.

Barsamya said: Thy mind is greatly blinded, O judge, and so also is that of the emperors who gave thee authority; nor are the things that are manifest seen by you; nor do ye perceive that lo! the whole creation worships Christ; and thou sayest to me, Do not worship Him, as if I alone worshipped Him Him whom the watchers(2) above worship on high.

The judge said: But if ye have taught men to worship Christ, who is it that has persuaded those above to worship Christ?

Barsamya said: Those above have themselves preached, and have taught those below concerning the living worship of the King Christ, seeing that they worship Him, and His Father, together with His divine Spirit.(3)

The judge said: Give up these things which your writings teach you, and which ye teach also to others, and obey those things which the emperors have commanded, and spurn not their laws lest ye be spurned by means of the sword from the light of this venerable sun.

Barsamya said: The light which pusseth away and abideth not is not the true light, but is only the similitude of that true light, to whose beams darkness cometh not near, which is reserved and standeth fast for the true worshippers of Christ.

The judge said: Speak not before me of anything else instead of that about which I have asked thee, lest I dismiss thee from life to death, for denying this light which is seen and confessing that which is not seen.

Barsamya said: I cannot leave alone that about which thou askest me, and speak of that about which thou dost not ask me. It was thou that spakest to me about the light of the sun, and I said before thee that there is a light on high which surpasses in its brightness that of the sun which thou dost worship and honour. For an account will be required of thee for worshipping thy fellow-creature instead of God thy Creator.

The judge said: Do not insult the very sun, the light of creatures, nor set thou at nought the command of the emperors, nor contentiously resist the lords of the country, who have authority in it.

Barsamya said: Of what avail is the light of the sun to a blind man that cannot see it? For without the eyes of

THE MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA

the body, it is not possible for its beams to be seen. So that by this thou mayest know that it is the work of God, forasmuch as it has no power of its own to show its light to the sightless.

The judge said: When I have tortured thee as thou deservest, then will I write word about thee to the Imperial government, reporting what insult thou hast offered to the gods, in that thou madest a disciple of Sharbil the priest, one who honoured the gods, and that ye despise the laws of the emperors, and that ye make no account of the judges of the countries, and live like barbarians, though under the authority of the Romans

Barsamya said: Thou dost not terrify me by these things which thou sayest. It is true, I am not in the presence of the emperors to-day; yet lo! before the authority which the emperors have given thee I am now standing, and I am brought to trial, because I said, I will not renounce God, to whom the heavens and the earth belong, nor His Son Jesus Christ, the King of all the earth.

The judge said: If thou art indeed assured of this, that thou art standing and being tried before the authority of the emperors, obey their commands, and rebel not against their laws, lest like a rebel thou receive the punishment of death.

Barsamya said: But if those who rebel against the emperors, even when they justly rebel, are deserving of death, as thou sayest; for those who rebel against God, the King of kings, even the punishment of death by the sword is too little. The judge said: It was not that thou shouldest expound in my judgment-hall that thou wast brought in before me, because the trial on which thou standest has but little concern with expounding, but much concern with the punishment of death, for those who insult the emperors and comply not with their laws.

Barsamya said: Because God is not before your eyes, and ye refuse to hear the word of God; and graven images that are of no use, "which have a mouth and speak not," are accounted by you as though they spake, because your understanding is blinded by the darkness of paganism in which ye stand

The judge interrupting said: Leave off those things thou art saying, for they will not help thee at all, and worship the gods, before the bitter tearings of combs and harsh tortures come upon thee.

Barsamya said: Do thou too leave off the many questions which lo! thou askest me, and give command for the stripes and the combs with which thou dost menace me: for thy words will not help thee so much as thy inflictions will help me.

The judge said: Let Barsamya be hanged up and torn with combs.

And at that very moment there came to him letters from Alusis(1) the chief proconsul, father of emperors.(2) And he commanded, and they took down Barsamya, and he was not torn with combs; and they took him outside of the hall of judgment.

And the judge commanded that the nobles, and the chief persons, and the princes, and the honourable persons of the city, should come before him, that they might hear what was the order that was issued by the emperors, by the hand of the proconsuls, the rulers of the countries under the authority of the Romans. And it was found that the emperors had written by the hand of the proconsuls to the judges of the countries:(3) "Since our Majesty commanded that there should be a persecution against the people of the Christians, we have heard and learned, from the Sharirs whom we have in the countries under the dominion of our Majesty, that the people of the Christians are persons who eschew murder, and sorcery, and adultery, and theft, and bribery and fraud, and those things for which the laws of our Majesty also exact punishment from those who commit them. We, therefore, in our impartial justice, have commanded that on account of these things the persecution of the sword shall cease from them, and that there shall be rest and quietness in all our dominions, they

THE MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA

continuing to minister according to their custom and no man hindering them. It is not, however, towards them that we show clemency, but towards their laws, agreeing as they do with the laws of our Majesty. And, if any man hinder them after this our command, that sword which is ordered by us to descend upon those who despise our command, the same do we command to descend upon those who despise this decree of our clemency."

And, when this command of the emperor's clemency was read, the whole city rejoiced that there was quietness and rest for every man. And the judge commanded, and they released Barsamya, that he might go down to his church. And the Christians went up in great numbers to the judgment-hall, together with a great multitude of the population of the city, and they received Barsamya with great and exceeding honour, repeating psalms before him, according to their custom; there went also the wives of the chief of the wise men. And they thronged about him, and saluted him, and called him "the persecuted confessor," "the companion of Sharbil he martyr." And he said to them: Persecuted I am, like yourselves; but from the tortures and combs of Sharbil and his companions I am clean escaped.(4) And they said to him: We have heard from thee that a teacher of the Church has said, "The will, according to what it is, so is it accepted."(5) And, when he was entered into the church, he and all the people that were with him, he stood up and prayed, and blessed them and sent them away to their homes rejoicing and praising God for the deliverance which He had wrought for them and for the Church.

And the day after Lysinas(6) the judge of the country had set his hand to these Acts, he was dismissed from his authority.

I Zenophilus and Patrophilus are the notaries who wrote these Acts, Diodorus and Euterpes,(7) Sharirs of the city, bearing witness with us by setting—to their hand, as the ancient laws of the ancient kings command.

This(8) Barsamya, bishop of Edessa, who made a disciple of Sharbil, the priest of the same city, lived in the days of Fabianus, bishop of the city of Rome. And ordination to the priesthood was received by Barsamya from Abshelama, who was bishop in Edessa; and by Abshelama ordination was received from Palut the First; and by Palut ordination was received from Serapion, bishop of Antioch; and by Serapion ordination was received from Zephyrinus, bishop of Rome; and Zephyrinus of Rome received ordination from Victor of the same place, vis., Rome; and Victor received ordination from Eleutherius; and Eleutherius received it from Sorer; and Soter received it from Anicetus; and Anicetus received it from Dapius;(1) and Dapius received it from Telesphorus; and Telesphorus received it from Xystus;(2) and Xystus received it from Alexander; and Alexander received it from Evartis;(3) and Evartis received it from Cletus; and Cletus received it from Anus;(4) and Anus received it from Simon Cephas; and Simon Cephas received it from our Lord, together with his fellow-apostles, on the first day of the week, the day of the ascension of our Lord to His glorious Father, which was the fourth day of Heziran,(5) which was the nineteenth(6) year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, in the consulship of Rufus and Rubelinus, which year was the year 341; for in the year 309 occurred the advent(7) of our Saviour in the world, according to the testimony which we ourselves have found in a correct register(8) among the archives, which errs not at all in whatever it sets forth.

Here endeth the martyrdom of Barsamya, bishop of Edessa.

ELUCIDATION

(See p. 665, note 4. Also, p. 685, note 1, of Barsamya.)

I FOUND at the Armenian Convent of St. Lazarus, near Venice, a version of the Letter of Abgar, translated into French "from the Armenian version of the fifth century," and published in 1868, which is now before me. It ascribes the original to Laboubnia, and adds: "The name Leroubna, mentioned only by Moses of Choren, was not repeated after him by any one else, save, perhaps, Mekhitar d' Airivank (one of our chroniclers of the

THE MARTYRDOM OF BARSAMYA,(1) THE BISHOP OF THE BLESSED CITY EDESSA

thirteenth century), who puts him among our historians, between Tatien and Mar Ibas Gadina, but without affirming whether he knew him only by name or also by his writings." The editor goes on to speak of his correspondence with Dr. Cureton (A.D. 1864) which is referred to in note 4, P. 665, supra. He notes the incomplete and mutilated character of the Syriac copies used by Cureton, and congratulates himself on the entire and integral condition of the Armenian, which he found in 1852 in the Imperial Library at Paris, as Codex No. 88, MSS. Armen. Here the name of the author is given as Laboubnia, and agrees with the Syriac. The interpolations he regards as made after the fourth century.