

THE PROTESTANT CHANCERY.

At its Annual Meeting, held in May 1904, the Western Turkey Mission voted to appoint a permanent committee, the duties of which should be to keep in touch with the Protestant Chancery, report on its work and, together with missionary associates in the various stations and under several Boards, advise and encourage the various communities in their efforts to maintain this Chancery.

The undersigned were chosen to serve on this Committee. At the Annual Meeting this year Mr. McNaughton's name was added to the Committee and a vote was passed requesting the Committee to issue a statement in regard to the Chancery for the use of all the missionaries in the Empire in urging on the Protestant communities their moral and financial obligations towards the Chancery.

In accordance with this vote the Committee has the honor to submit the following facts and suggestions with the hope that they may be of service.

The Chancery.

It is evident that few among the people grasp the fact that there is a vital connection between every Protestant institution or organization in Turkey and the Chancery at Constantinople. His Imperial Majesty, Sultan Abdul Hamid II., recognizes the Protestant body of Turkey through its representative, whose election He sanctioned in February, 1889. Whether the case be one of presenting to His Majesty the interests of some distant community or of asking for the extension of imperial favors to the Protestant body at large, the individual on whom this important function rests is the Vekil of the community. It is true that the local Vekils in many of the important centers transact much of the local business; but, as is well known, all important matters must come through the Chancery, and aside from this it should be clearly understood that the local authorities officially recognize these Vekils solely because they represent the man who by an imperial edict stands as the civil head of the Protestant body of the Empire. It is not far from the truth to say that a large majority of communities regard the Chancery as a sort of bureau for the transaction of casual business, such as the securing of firmanis, and that a financial return is due the Chancery only for specific services rendered. This is a misconception, the pernicious results of which are already apparent. Suppose, however, that this view is the correct one and this «bureau» finding it impossible to pay even its office rent out of the meagre returns should decide to withdraw, what would be the result? Before long there would be no Chancery, and through inexcusable neglect the Community would lose by default a well nigh priceless boon granted by His Majesty, Sultan Abdul Mejid, in 1850. The edict begins in the following words, «Let it be known on receipt of this my noble rescript that whereas those of my christian subjects who have embraced

the Protestant faith have suffered inconveniences and difficulties in consequence of their not having been hitherto placed under a separate jurisdiction, and in consequence of the patriarchs and primates of their old creeds, which they have abandoned, not being naturally able to administer their affairs»

No intelligent person informed as to the importance of holding fast hard won privileges need be told that such a contingency as the obliteration of the Chancery would be a severe blow to the cause for which several missionary boards have given their best of life and treasure for three quarters of a century. Ground once lost may never be recovered. We put this point as strongly as a circular of this kind will permit, feeling sure that our associates appreciate the importance of the matter. Moreover it must be remembered that on the Vekil rests the responsibility of guaranteeing the good faith and loyalty of the people he represents. If in the eyes of the Government any irregularities or violations of privilege are taking place within a certain Protestant community, the Vekil is held responsible and the matter is referred to him. Thus it will be seen that His Majesty holds the Vekil responsible for the loyalty of his community and also expects him to act as medium for his people in the event of any injustice being done them.

The point from which to grasp the situation is the Government's point of view. It matters little whether this or that group of individuals see the necessity of a Chancery, or at least its special benefit to themselves. The Government practically ignores all groups, communities, even denominations, and recognizes only the officially appointed head. It decrees that if there is a body there must be a head and if there is no head there is certainly no body. In other words, no organization in Turkey, however strong, may expect a continuance of its official standing if through its own neglect it fails to maintain the head sanctioned by His Majesty to represent that body.

It is clear then that aside from all the important services it renders by the transaction of a considerable amount of business during the year, the Chancery is absolutely necessary in order to keep open the channel of communication between the Sovereign of the country and his Protestant subjects. Scarcely any folly could be greater than for a Protestant to minimize the importance of the Chancery and above all to neglect giving it his financial support. A parallel case would be for a foreign subject to attach no importance to the Embassy of his own country and to repudiate all personal obligations towards its maintenance.

After a careful investigation into the affairs of the Chancery we feel under obligation to add a word in regard to the present Vekil of the Protestant community, A. H. Boyajian Eff. His abilities are too well known to require mentioning here, while it is admitted that from the standpoint of education and culture no member of the Protestant community, is better fitted for the office. For seventeen years without salary or remuneration he has carried the weight of his arduous office with a fidelity which very few people realize. The records fortunately show how ably this man has supported the interests of his people in critical times, how persistently he has worked and is still working for the royal favors which mean the peaceful enjoyment of the privileges of worship and education.

One further fact which made a deep impression on our minds is that in order to keep the office open Boyajian Eff. has generously advanced the necessary funds from his own pocket and the sums thus advanced exceed one hundred and eighty liras, not to mention the arrears in the salaries of those whom he employs.

Finances.

After being given the utmost freedom by Boyajian Eff. in the matter of investigating the financial standing of the Chancery our Committee was astonished to find how meagre the returns have been from the people in whose interest the Vekil and his staff are working. For instance, during 1904 the total contributions from the communities amounted to only L. T. 54, more than half of which came from Constantinople. The fees received during the year brought in only L. T. 59, giving a total income of L. T. 113. The inadequacy of this sum is evident since in order to run the Chancery on its present ill equipped basis at least L. T. 300 are required for clerical and general expenses not including any remuneration for the Vekil himself. Now in order to put the Chancery on a basis which will give satisfaction to all concerned in the transaction of business at least L. T. 100 should be added to the amount available for general expenses. As a matter of justice to the present Vekil and with an eye to the future of the Chancery when Boyajian Eff. can no longer serve, a provision of at least L. T. 300 should be made for the salary of the Vekil. This will bring the total sum required up to L. T. 700 per annum, and this would be the most economical basis possible. After careful consideration of this imperative need, in the light of past experiments, we would offer the following suggestions, it being understood that our Committee assumes no power to dictate either to our associates or to native communities.

Fees and Contributions.

The local Vekils may be made to understand that as they hold their office solely by virtue of the recognition accorded them through the Vekil at Constantinople they are under obligations to consider the proper support of the Chancery as a permanent issue, and that it is an important part of their service to assist in raising the necessary funds. We would suggest, therefore, that each community choose at least two men from their number to serve with the local Vekil or Mukhtar as a financial committee which shall have in charge the collecting of the fees charged for local business, dividing the same on a percentage basis between the local Vekil or Mukhtar and the Chancery; also of assessing on the community the fixed sums payable to the local Vekil for his services and to the Chancery for its support. We would suggest under fees that hereafter a small amount be added to the local fees charged and that the addition be set aside for the Chancery. For instance, if heretofore five piasters have been charged for an *Ilmikhaber*, hereafter seven and one half piasters be fixed as the fee and that of this, two and one half piasters be apportioned to the Chancery.

In the second place we would suggest that the amount assessed on each community, so far as the Chancery is concerned, be in proportion not to the membership of the church but to the *yearly expenses* of the community for schools and church, taking as a basis only what is paid by the people. In order to facilitate the adoption of such a system we will forward to each station a list of the communities within its field appending the suggested contribution asked from each community. As there may be some delay in tabulating this list we would suggest that three per cent of local expenses met by the people might be regarded as a fair contribution to be made for the benefit of the Chancery at Constantinople. Of course any arrangement of this kind must be purely voluntary and should be entered upon by a mutual agreement between the people and their head men.

A Final Word.

We are glad to assure all friends of evangelical work in Turkey that the Chancery is achieving solid results year by year.. In this connection we might mention the fact that during the past five years more than ten Firmans have been secured and that during this period over one thousand letters have been received and a correspondence maintained in regard to the legal status of the schools and churches of His Majesty's Protestant subjects.

Effort is being made to place the Chancery on such a satisfactory business basis as will remove all cause for complaint in the future.

We would emphasize again that this matter touches the missionary work of the entire Empire at a vital point and that no one whose interests are bound up in these widely scattered communities can afford to ignore the situation any longer. The time for a decisive effort has come and may not be safely postponed.

We therefore make an earnest appeal to all our fellow workers to assist in the solution of this problem before it is too late, and within the limits of prudence to spare no efforts in bringing at least the wiser heads of the communities to a realization of the situation.

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