An Exhortation to the Priesthood, ascribed to Ignatius of Antioch (Mingana translation)

Pseudo-Ignatius (4th–5th century)

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Prefatory Note and Translation

(ii) Genuine and Apocryphal Works of Ignatius of Antioch.

Prefatory Note.

A. The following pages contain the text and the translation, accompanied by a critical apparatus, of an "exhortation to priesthood," attributed to Ignatius of Antioch. I have edited the text from the two extant MSS., designated here as P. and M. P. indicates the Paris MS. Syr. 198 and M. indicates a MS. of my own collection in the custody of the Rendel Harris Library, Birmingham, marked Syr. MS. Mingana 223. Both MSS. are undated, but on palæographic grounds can be ascribed to about the sixteenth century. While the two MSS. come near each other in point of date, they are totally different as to the country of provenance. There are stylistic peculiarities in P. which indicate that it was copied in Syria, and there are linguistic features of the same domain which seem to indicate that M. was written in Mesopotamia. The orthography used in the two offers considerable variation, but there is reason to believe that both of them emanate from a single prototype the immediate successors of which had begun to exhibit some variants at the time when our MSS. were copied.

That the Arabic style used in the text is a translation from Syriac is made abundantly clear by the fact that genuine Syriac words and complete Syriac sentences are found in it; indeed, even the mere construction of the Arabic sentences denotes sometimes a Syriac original. There is, however, a passage which in both MSS. is worded in rhymed prose. If such a passage is to be considered also a translation from Syriac, we shall be bound to admit that the translator allowed himself a great amount of freedom in his work. A note that I have added at the foot will assist the reader to form his own opinion on the subject. The Arabic used in the text is most unclassical and is full of grammatical and lexicographical mistakes; indeed it represents the lowest type of Christian Arabic used in Church services, but it can be illustrated by scores of similar tracts written in the same non-Arab Arabic. I have collated the two MSS. and placed in the footnotes the various readings which appeared to me of some importance. The variants which were of purely orthographical order, or which were clearly due to a slip on the part of the copyists, have been completely ignored. I have generally followed in my transcription the orthography used in P., but this does not imply

that that orthography is always the best. To save space I had simply to follow one of the two MSS., and I decided to follow generally P. rather than M.

The Arabic text is printed in Garshūni (Arabic in Syriac characters), as it was found in the MSS., and a facsimile of each MS. is given to show the reader its palæographical peculiarities. The translation which I have adopted often gives only the meaning rather than a literal rendering of the original, and always follows the text that is printed in the main page to the exclusion of that found in the footnotes. B. I have attached to the above Arabic treatise a Syriac Canon attributed also to Ignatius of Antioch and evidently culled from a collection of ecclesiastical Canons used by the West Syrian Church. It is taken from Syr. Cod. Mingana 1, fol. 194b in the custody of the Rendel Harris Library, Birmingham. The date of the MS. is 27 March, 1884, of the Greeks (A.D. 1573). A facsimile of all the page on which the Canon is written accompanies the translation.

Translation.

A. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, one God, we will begin with the assistance of God to write the epistle of the holy Mar Ignatius the fiery on admonition and exhortation to priests. May his prayers be with us! Amen! He said: O my brethren and O my beloved priests and deacons, and O bishops, listen to me and hear my words to you. You wish to be watchful and ever ready; purify, therefore, your bodies and sanctify your souls so that the Lord may not destroy you. Wipe off dirt from your hearts, put your accounts in order, and clean out of your consciences envy, deceitfulness, and other iniquities, so that Jesus Christ may not put an end to you as He did to the priests who preceded you. O my brethren, open your hearts in order that the Christ may cause love, quiet, peace, and safety to abide in them, and everything that is congruous to the Lord in order that you may have pleasure with Him, and rejoice in His grace, and sit for ever at His right.

O my beloved, because the first Adam did not stand by his birth-right, that is to say his chastity and his holiness, but transgressed the command of his Lord, he was separated from his kingdom, and became a stranger to his possessions, and went out of the paradise of his inheritance. The Lord then decreed and ordered death against him because of his transgression, and struck him with the sword of the devastating fire, and threw him in the dark city of death where he became subject to the latter, and because of his prevarications this same death ruled over him for seven thousand years. O my brethren look at the accursed Cain, the second priest, and the abominable, impure, accursed, and murderous man; because the desire of killing dwelt in him, his sacrifice was refused, and out of jealousy he murdered his brother, and became separated from God and from his fathers, accursed and anathematized, and was a vagabond and a fugitive in this world, and was the first man to enter hell.

O my brethren. . . . O priests (listen to) the saying of Moses, the head of the prophets, who cried with his voice and said to the priests and the deacons: ”Sanctify yourselves because you serve the Holy One.” O priests who have lost their priesthood, and transgressed the rules of their Master, obey the prescriptions of your Master and do not neglect His word.

Do not make light of the offices of the Church of God and do not despise the majesty which belongs to the holy altar, and to the One who is offered on it. O high-ranked priests, do you not see those who serve the earthly kings how neat and clean they are, and how careful they are in washing their hands and keeping their clothes clean. Examine how similarly kept are the utensils which are on the table such as plates, drinking vessels, goblets, and wine utensils and cups in which there are no dregs nor feculence of any kind, and also the ordinary bread and thin bread: how neat and clean everything is, without any deficiency or defect. People line up erect to honour earthly kings who are human beings like ourselves and mortals sons of mortals; O my brethren, with how much more care should we, therefore, guard the Divine table, and serve it efficiently with faithfulness and holiness and with an outward appearance in which there is no defect and imperfection of any kind.

O my brethren, great woe be to the priests who do not keep their priesthood with good works. The Church and its children weep over the priest who sins, and give also woe to the deacon who does not act in the right way. How can the one who acts badly penetrate into the inner part of the house of God? It is not right, therefore, that an iniquitous priest should offer the sacrifice of other people and enter into the holy church of God, nor is it right that his unclean hands should handle that holy body, and be dipped in the blood of the Lord. How can a priest who is not clean in his actions sacrifice that holy body which was lifted up on the Cross, and before which the companies of angels stand in awe and the choirs of heaven in fear, while they are unable to contemplate its splendour? How can any one who is impure and immoral dare handle it with his dirty hands? How can also any one who is an occasion of scandal to other people sacrifice that sublime, high, holy and pious body, who hates the drunkards and the immoral people? Have you not heard then what He says in the pure Gospel: ”Scandal will arise but woe to the man through whom scandal comes.” He also says: ”Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt has lost its savour wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is thenceforth good for nothing, neither for the land nor for the dung, but it is cast out and trodden under foot by men” and it also becomes a vile object and an example.

O my brethren, there is no sin in the earth more terrible than that of a priest, for which there is no forgiveness. O my friends, lament and weep continually over the priest who did not fear sin. The weeping of the terrestrial people not being sufficient for him, the inhabitants of heaven weep also over him: the Seraphim like whom he was holy, and out of whose sanctification he fell. The blessed Cherubim weep also over him, because his sweet lyre is silent of their melodious tunes. The angels and the High Companies (of the Archangels) weep over him, because through his bad works the voice of his praises has ceased to praise with theirs. All those (of his pupils) who fell out of his command weep over him. The weeping of the inhabitants of land and water not being sufficient for him, O holy Church gather together thy children, the celestial and the terrestrial, and come and set up wailing and lamentation over the infamous and accursed priest who has been wounded by sin. Weep also over the deacon who by his bad actions has become the companion of Satan. O my brethren, who is the man who does not weep over a priest who has estranged himself from his Master like that disciple Judas who sold his Master?

O Simon, head of the disciples, weep and lament over the shepherd who, after having been like you and after having taken from his Master like you that talent in order to trade with it, has lost all the sheep, and his soul is drowned. O my brethren, who will not weep over the absolver of sins who falls into sin, and who will not weep over a shepherd who becomes a wolf? Who will not weep over a watchman who becomes a thief, and who will not weep over a merchant who becomes a spy, and a physician who is wounded by sin and has no remedy? Weep, O Church, over your priest. Weep, O Simon and John, over your companion who left your companionship and became a stranger to you. Who envied you, O chaste one, and made you a fornicator? Who envied you, O pure one, and made of you an immoral man? Who envied you, O fasting man, and made of you a gluttonous man given to excess? Who envied you, O just one, and made of you a companion of the ignorant? Who envied you, O devout and pious one, and made you a wretch with the sinners? Who envied you, O man filled with sanctity, and made you sink in the sinfulness of iniquity? Who envied you, O fair one, and filled you with unholiness? Who envied you, O just man, and placed you in the company of sinners and enemies? Who envied you, O child (of the house), and made you a stranger to your father and your brothers? Who envied you, O near relative, and made you a stranger to your relations? Who envied you, O celestial one, and made you terrestrial? Who envied you, O truthful one, and made of you a liar, and filled you with sins and shameful deeds?

O you dear and beloved ram who became the prey of a wolf! O hart who fell in the snare! O you agile eagle who fell in the net! O warrior who was beaten and ran away! O athlete who took to flight! O mariner whose ship has sunk! O husbandman whose corn has perished! O steward who squandered his treasures! O table-companion who left his place at the table! O bridegroom whose bridal chamber did not please him! O mighty King whose crown fell from his head! O judge condemned for his ignorance! O chieftain who lost the greatness of his headship! O wealthy one who became poor by his will! O sun whose rays have perished! O moon whose light has suffered eclipse! O seed of pure wheat which has been mixed up with tares! O beautiful and lovely flower which has been smitten by the blighting wind of sin! O admirable rose the beauty of which has perished in the frost of ignorance! O pomegranate-flower which withered in the midday heat of sin and iniquity.

Where are you O Paul and Timothy? Where are your warnings, your canons, and your conditions, which to-day your companions have transgressed by stumbling? O just Power, for how long wilt Thou not utter the cry of vengeance against the priests? Where are Thy punishments and Thy zeal against the ancients? How is it that Thou art silent now? Heaven is amazed at such a silence. Where is the heart that can stand it and not break? O my brethren, that just Power which has equalized justice to all mankind, has left everything to the next world, in which each one of us shall answer for his actions. O my brethren, let us place the judgment of God before our eyes, because we cannot avoid answering for our words and for all those He confided to our care: the souls redeemed by the innocent blood of God, and we have to return them as we received them. He gave us a pact to the effect that we shall worship Him, be with Him, and shepherd His flock.

O my brethren, the sin of a priest is a wound which has no remedy. O my brethren, at the time the priest sins, sadness overtakes the multitude of angels in heaven. What shall we say concerning those who believed that they had no sins, while Satan robbed and plundered them? They asserted that God is forgiving and merciful, and they did not know that God is also a just and equitable judge. O my brethren, let the story of Ananias and his wife inspire you with fear, and take fright at the spectacle of those priests who were burned for small sins. O my brethren, be afraid of the story of Korah and Abiram, because all of them have become a mirror to us so that we may hear what happened to them and fear; and do not sin and serve Satan like them.

O priest, who is the one who will not weep over you? O great one and O confidential steward, brother of Simon and John, it has been laid down that no one be appointed to priesthood except the one who is blameless, and lo there is to-day shame and dishonour in your bed; and we do not find it difficult to cover you up! O exiled one, who has been separated from his service, and his high office, we weep over the high office of priesthood which you have besmirched by your iniquitous act; and we do not feel any sorrow at the beauty of your stature! O ignorant one who did not know his own self, we weep over the crown of holiness which you have dishonoured by your bad deed! The Lord had established you as a mediator between Him and His Father, and not a mediator to the idols; you did not approach priesthood in order to induce people to sin and detach them from God, but to uplift them and bring them nearer to Him.

Woe to your spirit when your companions sit on the twelve thrones and you are driven out like the one who wore dirty garments. Lo shame is in your bed and it pleases you to dishonour your bed, and you make light of it. You have changed your zeal to your Master for a zeal to another master, and you have become a stranger to Him, and that is why fire will consume your body without getting satiated with it. O my brethren, there will not be mercy in the day of judgment and decision for an unchaste priest, and he will not be allowed to approach his throne, but he will be driven out like the five foolish virgins. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul cried and said: "If a person desire priesthood he desireth a good desire." Lo to-day the priests of the different peoples desire the office of headship while they are far from real priesthood and remote from its works.

O my brethren, listen to what has been enacted against those who bear the yoke of priesthood but make light of it or neglect it: they shall burn with those two hundred and fifty priests who were burnt with their censers. O brethren, O priest, O deacon, any deacon who approaches his wife in the time of the fast that the Saviour fasted will not find mercy in that great day, the day of landmark and finality; this will happen also if he approaches her on the occasion of a festival, or on a Friday, or on a Wednesday. Anyone who approaches his wife in one of these days, his burning shall be with the fire of Sodom. This does not apply to the children of the Church, the laymen, but it is advantageous also for them to abstain from marriage in the above mentioned days. O my brethren, the priests should not neglect, but should be diligent in, their service and careful with the vestry of the holy altar and the

belongings of the Church. O my brethren, any priest who makes light of them or neglects them, and serves with them in this state the holy body which was lifted up on the wood of the cross—I say to him that his lot shall be with those who cast lots upon the garments of Christ; with such shall his share be without pity; also the priests who steal from the belongings of the Church, and from what pertains to it in the matter of the ex-votos of orphans and widows who gave them on behalf of their sins: heaven and earth shall weep over such priests, and their sin is greater that that of those who became the companions of Ananias and his wife.

O my brethren, a priest entering (a church?) to offer sacrifice with a heart in which there is rancour against his brother, is like Cain the murderer. A priest who sees a needy person and does not help him, or a thirsty person in want of a drop of water and does not quench his thirst, and a priest who sees a sick person and turns his face from him, will have no share in paradise. Accursed is the priest who does not know his own self, who dishonours himself with such sins; such a one will be separated from his service and his priesthood, and the Father will rebuke him for not having served his office rightly and justly; the Son of the Father will not accept him; the Holy Spirit will avoid him, and all the celestial multitudes will push him out to inherit hell where he will receive a just retribution for his service.

Because he did not perform the duties of his priesthood with piety and devotion, the angels will take away from him the imposition of the hands of priesthood, which had fallen on his head, and they will push him out to hell in company of the impure, unchaste, and ignorant people; there he will weep and wail and also gnash his teeth. The priest, however, who performs the duties of his priesthood with devotion and piety, and offers sacrifice to God with holiness, and serves before Him with good order and pious deeds, will be served by God and by the multitudes of angels, who will exalt his office and his priesthood; and he will live in pleasure in the company of Simon, the head of the Apostles, and he will be placed among all the Fathers, the Saints, the Prophets, and the Doctors of the Church. Similarly the deacons who leave the office of Stephen and of those preachers who serve the church, will go and serve Satan and his armies. What shall I say about them? On the one hand if I keep silence, such a silence may lead to misunderstanding, and if I speak my heart will not allow me to rebuke them, but truth itself sits in judgment against them. Instead of requiring from every deacon good works, fasting and prayer, vouched for by good men, we present to-day to this high office men who are uneducated, ignorant, not steeped in piety, untruthful, and having no witnesses to vouch for their veracity and uprightness. (The deacons) are thus liars, transgressors, drunkards, haters of their service, haters of the Church, haters of fast and prayers, insolent, and proud like Satan. Those who are addicted to such vices and have left the commandments and the law of God and do not turn to penitence will from this world receive punishment for ever and ever.

The deacon has to obey orders and commandments; he is not to neglect any virtue that pleases God: fast, prayer, holiness, and piety. O my beloved (deacon), you should not neglect your soul on the pretence that you have not the yoke of priesthood. O my brother, fear the

day of reckoning and punishment and the furnace of fire. O my brother, obey the injunctions of God, and lend your neck to the yoke of Christ; be sweet-tempered and humble towards your brethren, and love the strangers, the poor, and the beggars. O my brother, educate yourself and the people of Christ; when you go to the altar in order to perform your duties take care and pains to do it in good order so that you may please your Lord; let us examine our accounts and see whether we have any hatred towards our neighbours, and whether we have only love and peace.

O my brother, the deacon who neglects prayers will be judged with Satan, and the deacon who disregards the duties of his service will be in a place where there is no praise of God and where he will be ministered to by the furnace of fire; the deacon who frequents the company of drunkards, the worm that does not die will be intoxicated from him; the deacon who leaves the Church on the night of Sundays and festivals, and wishes to drink wine, the Church of heaven will drive him out to where she will not hear his voice; the deacon on account of whom God is mocked at, would to God that he had never existed; the deacon who causes uproar and discord in the Church, will be consumed by fire alive; the deacon who fails to control his soul and his desires, will be far from heaven; the deacon who makes use of marriage and comes to perform his duties, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost will be angry with him; the deacon who goes to the altar while intoxicated, the spirit of justice will rebuke him; the deacon who commits a sin and does not confess it and repent, his torment will be eternal and perpetual.

O my brethren, if you have accepted this order for the satisfaction of the desires of your soul, you will not have forgiveness, and you will suffer with Satan; but if you have accepted this order to serve the Lord who was crucified on your behalf, do not be the servants of Satan. O my beloved, avoid the service of Satan, intoxication, pride, and gluttony, and do not disappoint anyone, and avoid also lies which are a sign of the sad unbelief of the world. O my brethren, have you not heard what the divine Apostle Paul said: ”neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor abusers of themselves with men, none of these will inherit the kingdom of heaven and cross (the bridge ?) to it.”? O my beloved, keep your soul from sin, and purify your body from bad passions so that you may not suffer. O my brethren, the deacons who walk in the way of God, keep His Commandments, serve the Church with piety, serve the people of God, and long for fast and prayer, the angels will long to meet them, and will also accompany them and take them to heaven on their wings in order that they may enjoy bliss and happiness with the priestly Fathers, and the pious, in the kingdom of heaven the joys of which will not cease, and be glorified at the table of Christ, as His holy mouth uttered: ”Where I am there my servant shall be.” There you will also hear the sweet voice: ”Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you before the foundation of the world.” You will also be table-guests of the angels, and along with martyrs (and) evangelists you will receive ample reward; and you will serve and rejoice with Stephen.

We who are plunged in sin ask God not to make us deserve hell, but the above grace and virtue. To Him are fitting glory, honour, majesty, and power, with His Father, and His Holy Spirit, now, at every time, and for ever and ever. Amen. (Colophon.) (Here recite) Pater Noster. May the grace of God be with the weak and miserable scribe, with the pious readers, and with the blessed hearers! May we have mercy upon us through the prayer of the mother of Fire, the queen of the worlds, the Mother of God, hoping that the Lord will deliver us from fire in the day of judgment! Amen! May the grace of God be with us all! Amen! Amen! This has ended by the help of God.

Translation.
B. "Of Ignatius the fiery (Canon) 38. We observe the night of Wednesday because in it our Lord announced His passion to His disciples, and they were troubled with sorrow; we observe the night of Friday because in it our Lord was seized by the Jews; we do not observe the night of Saturday, because in it there was rest to all the dead of Sheol, at the descent of our Lord to them. He who does not observe the night of Friday and Wednesday, will be condemned with those who bound our Lord on the night of Friday, and those who observe the night of Saturday, will be condemned with those who broke the legs of the robbers, in order that the Sabbath day may not begin for them and that they may not be condemned in the eyes of the law." C. When all the above pseudo-Ignatian matter was in the press I discovered the following quotations from Ignatius in Mingana Syr. MS. 37, written about A.D. 1450 (in the custody of the Rendel Harris Library, Birmingham).

The Ignatian Canon translated above is given in the following form on fol. 44a: "Ignatius the Fiery says: We observe the night of Wednesday because in it our Lord announced His passion to His disciples, and He was moved by affliction. We observe the night of Friday because in it our Lord was seized by the Jews and struck on the face by the servant of the High Priest, and was tied to a column. We do not observe the night of Saturday because in it there was rest to all the souls of the dead in Sheol by the descent of our Lord to them."

2°
On fol. 28a of the same MS. there is the following genuine quotation from Ignatius not found in the fragments edited by Cureton and Lightfoot. "Ignatius: Where is the disputer? Where is the wise man? Where is the boaster of those who are called intelligent? For our God Jesus the Christ was conceived by Mary according to an economy." Ad Ephes., xviii. This is an exact translation of the Greek of Ignatius as edited by Lightfoot (Apostolic Fathers, ii., 74) with the exception that "where is the wise man" is placed before "where is the boaster" and that instead of "boaster" there is in Greek "boasting" Καύχησις. The Syriac translation, however, brings the text of Ignatius nearer to 1 Cor i., 31.

Source. English translation by Alphonse Mingana, from ***Woodbrooke Studies: Christian documents in Syriac, Arabic and Garshūni***, edited and translated by A. Mingana, with introductions by Rendel Harris, volume 1 (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1927); public

domain. The text was read by machine (Mistral OCR) from a scan of the 1927 volume at the Internet Archive and has not been proofread against the printed book. SermonIndex has removed running heads and page numbers, joined words split across lines, and divided the text into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Footnotes and the editor's introduction are left out. Rendel Harris's introduction and the Garshūni text and facsimiles are also left out. No original-language text is shown beside it, and no modern English version has been made.

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