

1909.

Jerusalem,
January 1. 1909

Consul Blech
No. 1.

Last Paper.

(Print.)

(How disposed of.)

Action completed.

(Index.)

Next Paper.

No.

(Subject.)

mm
Greek Church dissensions
Reports on support given to Patriarch
by natives against Synod.

(Minutes.)

Home with ref.
There are several
despatches on
subject which I
think have been held back
in No. 21
12/1/09

1 Jan

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Received by post

Jerusalem.

January 1. 1909.

n^o. 1.

Sir,

Confidential.

*Metrop Blyth (Extract).
December 28. 1908.*

*Mr. Falanga n^o 68
December 30. 1908.*

In my despatch n^o. 61 of November 10th last I had the honour to report to Your Excellency the discussions which had arisen between the Greek Patriarchate and the native members of the Orthodox Church. Since that date the matter has caused a growing excitement among the natives and has given rise to an exchange of correspondence between the two parties, the local government, and the Authorities at Constantinople. Finally instructions came from the Grand Vizier that the question was to be submitted to the decision of the Administrative Council of the Sanjak. On December 24th the Council met and after prolonged discussion decided in favour of admitting the claim

Your Excellency

The Right Honourable

Sir Gerard Lowther, K.C.M.G., C.B.

of

of the native members of the Church for a Mixed Council which should exercise a measure of supervision over the affairs of the Patriarchate. In view of the lateness of the hour, and the next day being Friday, it was not until the 26th ultimo that this decision was officially communicated to the Patriarch. After some hesitation His Beatitude agreed to submit to it. But the Synod categorically declined to agree, and after violent discussions decided by fifteen votes to three to dethrone the Patriarch, as sacrificing the interests of the Church and as incompetent to hold his post. His office was declared to
be

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be vacant, and three bishops were designated to fulfil its duties pending the appointment of a successor (an arrangement subsequently modified).

This news caused the greatest excitement among the native members of the Church. Popular demonstrations were made, in which a deputation from Jatta which had come up on the same day to urge the claims of the natives in ignorance of the Synod's action also took part. Late in the evening certain influential "Greek" natives called on me to request that I would submit to Your Excellency their prayer that you would support the Patriarch in his refusal to recognise the decision of the Synod deposing him. My first question to these gentlemen was whether they had applied to any other Consulate for support: they assured
me

me that they neither had done nor intended to do so. The Russian Consul-General has at all times upheld the cause of the Greek natives against the Hellenic party, but I cannot ascertain that it has interfered, at least openly, in the present instance. On the other hand, the Greek Consul-General has warmly espoused the Hellenic cause, and his action has, I believe, been complained of in telegrams to Constantinople.

In view of these circumstances I thought myself justified in reporting the matter by telegraph to Your Excellency and in transmitting the request preferred to me. As shortly afterwards the Porte telegraphed that the decision of the Synod was illegal and that the Patriarch's deposition cannot be recognised, this is generally attributed to

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to the support of Your Excellency. I have carefully abstained from any interference in this matter, nor have I seen either the Mutesarif or the Patriarch since the question became acute. But, being consulted on Monday last, December 28th, by Bishop Blyth as to whether I thought it desirable that His Lordship should visit the Patriarch, to whom he owed a call, I replied that far from seeing any objection I thought this would be a most suitable mark of attention to His Beatitude, who was practically a prisoner - all visitors having for at least one day been refused access to him - and who was isolated, without a friend among his bishops and clergy, all infuriated against him at his so-called desertion of the cause of

the

the church. The Bishop accordingly
went, and I inclose a copy of his
letter to me. Since then the Patriarch
has addressed to the Grand Vizier
a telegram urging that two
Archimandrites whom he regards as
the ringleaders of the agitation should
be removed and punished. This very
demand is a sign of weakness, as
his Firmans and position give him
ample authority for dealing with
recalcitrant subordinates. It is
generally thought that if these two
were sent away peace could be
restored, and on that ground I
ventured to telegraph to Your Excellency
yesterday.

While

While far from seeking to
interfere in a matter outside my
province, it seemed to me that in
view of the action of the native
party in appealing to British support
it might be well to shew them that
their confidence was not misplaced:
they are, I think, altogether averse
from any desire to become the mere
tools of Russian policy, and view
with as much dismay as the Hellenes
the attempts made by Russia in the
past to render her influence paramount
throughout Palestine. I was moreover
strongly impressed with a sense of the
justice of their cause and of the
remarkable moderation with which
they pressed it.

On the only occasion (quite six
weeks ago) when I have spoken to
Subhi Bey on this subject, he
expressed

expressed confidentially the belief that
Russia was instigating the natives,
H (adding: "I can tell you this but
cannot say so to anyone else"). But
it seems to me that this is merely
the traditional suspicion which
every Turk entertains of Russian
interference in everything. Certainly
no sign of any instigation is
visible or requisite.

Subhi Bey has from the outset
tried to settle the matter peaceably:
at first he declined to recognise the
Patriarch's deposition, as unprecedented;
since then he has urged Monseigneur
Damianos to resign so as to
avoid further troubles, but His
Beatitude has refused on the solid
ground that to do so would be to admit
the

the justice of the charges of
incompetency and improper action which
the Synod brings against him.

Unless this matter is satisfactorily
settled by the Greek Christmas, trouble
may be apprehended. It is customary
on Christmas Eve for the Patriarch to
drive to Bethlehem in great pomp
and to celebrate the appropriate
services in the Church of the Holy
Nativity. If all the superior clergy
refuse to participate in the services on
the ground that he has been deposed
His Beatitude may prefer to abstain
from the usual celebrations. This
would greatly heighten the considerable
agitation already existing: on the
other hand, if he were to decide
to

to carry out his customary ecclesiastical
functions in spite of the hostility of
the clergy, I feel sure that he would
thereby acquire a still higher degree
of popularity among the natives.

The excitement throughout the
country is intense. Telegrams have
been sent from every village to
Constantinople in support of the
Patriarch, deputations are leaving
for the capital, and at Jaffa Mr.
Falanga reports that the people
have expelled the unpopular Superior
and have taken possession of the
Convent. I inclose a copy of his
despatch. Similar events are said

to

to have occurred at Acre.

I have the honour to be,

with the greatest respect,

Sir,

Your Excellency's

most obedient,

humble servant,

E. C. Blech.

Bishop Blyth to W. Bleck - December 28, 1908.

Your kind note was valuable. I should not have called at the Patriarchate, but as you thought the Patriarch would like it I did so, without making any appointment - he generally calls without. I was received immediately, the door was shut, but as guards were visible. There was a large deputation of the representatives of Bethlehem, not excited but saying they would die rather than he should be deposed. He looked well but anxious - he welcomed me much and said my visit particularly to-day (not only for Christmas but because of the anxieties of the time) was encouraging. I was afraid to say much about you, but I said that you were aware of my visit (you would guess it, I thought!) and wished me to express your goodwill and sympathy with him at this season. He was pleased. He thought at first I meant "when could he see you?" but I explained that you were not making an appointment, but were aware that I was calling.

I think it was decidedly a well-timed call, and I thank you much for the suggestion. There was no crowd, but a large group of Bethlehem folk

folk near the Patriarchate.

I hear the Governor promises a large force, if the Patriarch goes to Bethlehem, as the people wish. The Patriarch says he will make no promise, but he hopes that before then there will be peace and that the difficulties will be gone. He is a peacemaker, and he may succeed - but of course there may be a great excitement unless he can succeed in making peace. A telegram from Constantinople may make that easy.

Copy

No. 68.

Jaffa,

December 30. 1908.

Sir, I have the honour to report that the native Congregation of the Greek Orthodox Church at Jaffa who recently joined their co-religionists of Jerusalem in claiming certain rights which were refused to them by the Greek Monks known as the Brothers of the Holy Sepulchre at Jerusalem, have protested against the dismissal of His Beatitude the Greek Patriarch of Jerusalem, and have addressed several telegrams to Constantinople insisting upon the re-installment of His Beatitude.

The President of the Greek Convent at Jaffa, Archimandrite Yoaquides, having instructed the two native Priests in the

Convent

J. C. Blech Esq.

H. His Consul

Jerusalem

Convent not to mention the name of His
Beatitude the Patriarch in their prayers
during the service, and this having been
heard of by the Greek populace, a
numerous deputation called upon the
President and insisted upon his giving
orders to the Priests to mention the
Patriarch's name in the prayers and
to give his signature that he recognizes
His Beatitude Damianos as the Greek Patriarch
of Jerusalem; at the same time another
deputation called upon the Kaimmakam and
exposed to him what happened, the Kaimmakam
promised the crowd to telegraph to His
Excellency the Mutesarif in order to
ascertain the position of His Beatitude the
Patriarch and to let them know the
answer he receives.

It was then three o'clock in the
afternoon and a great crowd composed
almost of the whole of the Greek congregation
of

of Jaffa went in front of the Greek Convent, the
gates were closed and they began shouting
with very hard language against the President.
At that moment the Kaimmakam arrived
on the spot and while the priests opened
the gates to let him in, the crowd rushed
in at the same time and forced the
President to come out and got him into
a carriage which had been prepared for
him in front of the Convent.

It is said that the President went
straight to Jerusalem in the same night.
Now the Convent is in possession of the
native Greek Congregation and matters
stand thus.

I have the honour to
(Signed) J. Falanga