

John son of Saban

The Martyrdom of Abo, the Perfumer from Baghdad

During the two centuries, which separate the lives of St. Eustace and St. Abo, the whole political structure of the Near East had been altered by a series of military and political upheavals. After capturing Jerusalem in 614, the Persians had undergone complete and humili-ating defeat at the hands of the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius. The two great powers were by the middle of the 7th century so weakened by their death-struggle that Persia fell an easy prey to the new force of Islam, while the Arabs came at one point near to storming Constan-tinople itself. Tiflis, which had been for a short time under Byzantine control, was surrendered to the Arabs about the year 655, and remained until early in the 11th century under Muslim sway.

The Passion of St. Abo of Tiflis, who was put to death by the Arab governor of Georgia on January 6th, 786, is described by a Georgian observer, John son of Saban. His account has the merit of being written soon after Abo's death. In a prologue, which has been omitted in this translation, John describes the pitiful condition to which the Georgian nation had been reduced by Arab rule. The Caliphs had spared no effort to turn the Georgians into Muhammadans; force, cunning and economic coercion, complains John, had all been brought into play, with the result that some of the folk were "shivering like reeds in a high wind." It was partly to encourage his countrymen to stand firm that John relates the heroic death of St. Abo, himself an Arab by birth, but converted to Christianity while living in Georgia.

Abo's Passion is of value not only for the religious history of Georgia, but also for the remarkable account it contains of a journey to the Khaqan or Emperor of the Khazars, a people of Turkish origin who adopted the Jewish faith. From their headquarters on the Volga they played a vital role in caesar's politics and trade. Their rather unattractive habits and appearance became a by-word among the Greeks, who used the expression, "You Khazar-face!" as a term of abuse.

The German version of the Passion of St. Abo edited by K. Schultze in Hamack's *Texte und Untersuchungen* (1905) gives a full list of references for the numerous biblical quotations encountered throughout the text.

JANUARY 7Th . Passion of the Holy and blessed Martyr of Christ Abo, who was martyred in Georgia, in the town of Tiflis, by the hands of the Saracens; related by John, son of Saban, at the command of Samuel, by the grace of God Catholicos of Georgia.

Abo's arrival in Georgia, and his baptism

A.D. 772. Now this happened at the time when the ruling prince of Georgia, Nerses, son of the Kuropalates (#1) and ruling prince Adamerse, had been sum-moned to the land of Babylon by its ruler, the Saracen Caliph Abdulla, the Commander of the Faithful, who ruled in the great city of Baghdad which he himself had built. At the instigation of evil men, he cast Duke Nerses of Georgia into a dungeon, where he was kept for three years until by God's command the Caliph Abdulla died and was succeeded by his son Mahdi (A.D. 775-85). Then God in His beneficence prevailed on Mahdi the Com-mander of the Faithful to release Nerses. So he let him out of his foul dungeon and sent him home again to be Duke of his own country once more.

And now, O lovers of Christ, I should like to tell you about the blessed saint and martyr Abo, what sort of person he was, and how he came here to Georgia. He was born of the line of Abraham, of the sons of Ishmael and the race of the Saracens. He had no foreign blood in him, nor was he born of a slave-woman, but of pure Arab stock on both his father's and his mother's side of the family. His father and mother and brothers and sisters resided there in Baghdad, the city of Babylon. And he was a lad about eighteen, or at least seventeen years old.

Wishing to come here to Georgia with Duke Nerses, he entered into his service, because he was good at pre-paring fragrant scents and lotions, as well as being versed in the literature of the Saracens, the children of Ishmael, whom Hagar bore to Abraham.

It was not of his own free will that Abo decided to come to our country. Just as the Lord spoke to the blessed Abraham in that land of Chaldaeae, saying, "De-part from your country and your kindred and your father's house, and enter into a land which I will show you" - in the same way this descendant of Abraham was not actuated by his own resolution but by a

divine summons. So he left his father and mother, his brothers, sisters and relatives, his possessions and lands, as it is laid down in the Holy Gospel, and traveled here with Nerses for the love of Christ. When he arrived in Georgia he lived with Duke Nerses; his good qualities made him generally popular, and he learnt to read and write and converse freely in Georgian.

Then he started to acquire and read the holy books of the Old and the New Testaments, for the Lord guided his understanding. He used to go to church and listen regularly to the Holy Gospel and readings from the Prophets and Apostles, and ask questions and gain information from many expert theologians. Some of them, by seeming to oppose him, were really giving him the chance to gain knowledge. In this way he became perfectly familiar with all the doctrine which has been given by Christ to the Holy Catholic Church. And so he became estranged from the faith of Muhammad and abandoned the rites and beliefs of his native land. He began to love Christ with all his heart, being inspired by the words, "They related to me the creed of the heathen; but it was not like unto Thy law." As he could not profess Christianity openly, he fasted and prayed to Christ in secret, and looked for a hidden place where he might receive the baptism of Christ, for he was afraid of the Saracens who occupy and rule our land.

A.D. 779-80. Now at this time the Saracen authorities again became enraged against Duke Nerses, and he took to flight. Though hard-pressed by the Saracen army the Lord saved him from their hands, and he passed through the gateway of the Ossetes, which they call Dari-Alan (the Alans' Gate, or Darial Pass over the Caucasus). Among the three hundred men of his escort was Abo, the blessed servant of Christ.

Nerses came as a refugee from his own country into the land of the north, where is the home and abode of the sons of Magog who are called the Khazars - wild men, fearsome of face, savage in character, drinkers of blood, without religion, except that they recognize a god the creator. When Duke Nerses arrived in the presence of the King of the Khazars the latter welcomed him graciously, as a stranger and a refugee from his enemies, and gave him and his followers food and drink.

When the blessed Abo saw that he had left the dread of Saracen tyranny far behind he hastened to draw near to Christ, and was baptized by the hands of venerable priests, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. For there are many towns and villages in that northern land which by the grace of the Holy Ghost abide securely in the Christian faith. The blessed Abo was henceforth evermore filled by Christ's grace, and able to devote himself without hindrance to fasting and prayer.

After some time had elapsed Nerses asked the King of the North to let him leave for the land of Abkhazia; he had earlier sent his mother, wife, children and treasure and all his household there since that country was secure from the Saracen threat.

Then God put the King of the North into a kindly mood, and he let Nerses go after presenting him with many gifts. So they set out, joyful in God's grace, and crossed the land of the heathen folk who are entirely ignorant of God, travelling in safety day and night for three months (#2). The blessed Abo spent all the journey in prayer and fasting and uninterruptedly singing psalms. When they reached the land of Abkhazia, the prince of that country welcomed Nerses and all his retinue. When Nerses set eyes on the queen his mother, and his wife and children, everyone gave joyful praise to God for keeping them safe and sound.

After the prince of Abkhazia had heard about the blessed Abo and how he had recently been baptized, he and all his people were very glad. The prince and the bishops and priests invited him and gave him their blessing, fortified him with encouraging words and cheered him with the promise of eternal life in Christ Jesus. Abo for his part thanked them, answering with words of true faith, so that they were amazed and glorified God. More and more thanks did the blessed Abo render to God when he saw how their country was filled with Christ's faith, and no pagans were to be found living inside its borders. The frontiers of their land are formed by the Pontic (Black) Sea, which is a special domain of the Christian faith right up to the Khaldian borders. Trebizond is situated there, and so is Apsarea and the port of Nicopsia. And these towns and places are under the sway of the servant of God, the emperor of the Ionians, whose residence is in the great city of Constantinople.

When the blessed Abo saw the exceptional devoutness of the local people and their assiduity in prayer, he was filled with a fever of emulation, remembering the words of the holy apostle, "It is always good to imitate excellence." In that wintry season, on the 17th of January, the commemoration of our holy father Antony, he began to emulate Antony's severe exertions. Though living an urban life he struggled against man's enemy the devil as if he were out in the wilderness. By vigil and fasting he subdued his youthful flesh so that he was able to quench all the fiery darts of the evil one. He remembered how our Redeemer went out into the desert after His baptism and by praying and fasting forty days defeated the wiles of His tempter the devil. In the same way the blessed Abo uttered no word in human society, but directed his

gaze up to God in pious prayer; and thus he passed three months plunged in fasting and silent meditation. During those holy days of Lent, for seven weeks he used to partake of the sacred mystery of the body and Blood of Christ on Sundays and Saturdays. On these occasions only he used to take a little food. At last he reached the great and holy. Festival day of the Resurrection of Christ Our Lord; after this he relaxed his austere fasting and loosed his tongue from its silence and glorified God.

Meanwhile after the flight of Nerses from Georgia, the Caliph Muhammad sent Stephen, son of Gurgen, and nephew of Nerses, to be prince of that country in place of his uncle, according to God's command. Then Nerses was glad because God had not deposed his family from its royal dignity. As he was extremely homesick, he sent envoys to ask the Caliph's representatives in Georgia to grant him a safe-conduct, and set off homewards with all his followers.

Just as they were leaving the land of Abkhazia, the prince of Abkhazia summoned the blessed Abo and said to him, "Do not leave this country because the Saracens control the land of Georgia, and you are of Saracen birth. They will not tolerate you among them as a Christian. I am afraid for your sake lest they deflect you willy-nilly from the Christian faith, and so bring to nothing your great feats of piety."

But the blessed Abo replied, "Now that Christ has shown His mercy towards me and released me from the darkness of my original ignorance and made me worthy of being baptized in Him, nothing can make me deny His name. Even if they offer me vast sums of gold and silver or interrogate me with tortures and flogging, they cannot take away from me the love of my Saviour! So do not detain me, O faithful servant of God! For what merit is there in my staying here, where no danger exists, nor any chance of dying for Christ? I pray you now to let me go to reveal my Christian faith to those that hate Christ, just as I have heard that it was declared by Christ in the Holy Gospel, "No one lights a candle and puts it under a bushel, but they set it on a candle-stick, so that it may give light to all. Thus let your light shine before men." So why should I hide this radiant truth with which Christ has illumined me? Nothing will make me hide from the risk of death, for I have learnt from the holy apostle that "the faint-hearted cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Therefore I am not afraid of death, since I look for the kingdom of Christ."

A.D. 782. In this way he won over the prince who let him go. Then he went with Nerses to the land of Georgia and entered the city of Tiflis, where he walked about openly professing the Christian faith. Of the local Saracens who had known him before some swore at him, others tried to intimidate him, others pestered him, while some tried to win him over by soft words. But he re-mained firmly attached to Christ, and was quite un-moved by them. For three years he went about openly in the city and the villages nearby as a professing Christian, and nobody molested him, for his time had not yet come. But God-fearing people who knew of his piety provided him with food and clothes.

The martyrdom of St. Abo

You, who love Christ Jesus and the holy martyrs, listen to my account of this Christian hero, whose glorious courage won him the martyr's crown!

A.D.786. In the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, in that year after His Passion and Resurrection when Constantine, son of Leo, was reigning over the Christians in the great city of Constantinople, when Mousa, son of Mahdi, Commander of the Faithful, was reigning among the Saracens, in the pontificate of Samuel, Catholicos of Georgia, when Stephen, son of Gurgen, was Duke of Georgia, in the year 6424 from the Creation (#3), on Friday, January 6th, we commemorate the day of witness of the blessed saint and pious hero Abo in the city of Tiflis. Now this is how it occurred: -

A.D. 785. A little time before those days, the blessed martyr of Christ had been arrested and brought before the magistrate who was Amir (Saracen governor) over the city of Tiflis, who cast him into prison because of his Christian beliefs. Soon afterwards, however, Duke Stephen of Georgia intervened on his behalf and brought him out of prison and let him go.

A few days later, the people who had denounced the holy martyr were again moved to anger and fury, and filled with spite against the Christians. They concerted an intrigue against the saint and appeared before the new magistrate, who had replaced the previous Amir and judge in the city of Tiflis, and said to him, "In this town there is a youth who was a Saracen by birth and brought up to live in that faith which Muhammad the Prophet gave us; and now he has abandoned this faith of ours and declares himself a Christian and walks fearlessly about the city teaching many of our people how to become Christians. Now you order his arrest and have him tortured and beaten until he confesses the faith of our prophet Muhammad. If he refuses, then kill him, so that his words may not win him a lot of imitators."

When certain Christians heard what these people were urging they quickly went and told the blessed Abo. "Look you," they said, "they are now hunting for you to arrest, torture and heat you." And they besought him to run away and hide. But he replied, "I am ready to face not only torture hut even death for Christ's sake." So he went out cheerfully and walked openly about the city precincts.

Then the magistrate's ushers came and arrested the blessed Abo and dragged him before the judge. And the magistrate said to him, "What is this I hear about you, that you are a Saracen by birth and descent, and have abandoned your native religion and fallen into error among the Christians? Now get ready to pray according to the faith in which your parents brought you up."

The blessed Abo, however, fortified in devotion to Christ and filled with spiritual faith, said to the Amir his judge, "You are quite right saying that I am a Saracen by blood, born into that race oil both father's and mother's side. I was educated in the religion of Muhammad, and lived according to it as long as I remained in ignorance. But when the Almighty had mercy on me and selected me from among my brothers and relatives and saved me through His Son Jesus Christ my God, and granted me a more perfect understanding, then I quitted my former faith, as being a manmade creed based on fables thought up by human subtlety and invention. So now I cling to the true faith of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as revealed to us by Jesus Christ. In that faith I have been baptized and now worship, for this is the True God, and now I am a Christian un-wavering in my conviction."

The judge said to him, "Give up these insane ideas! If it was through any material want that you were attracted to the Christians, I will now treat you with greater gifts and favour."

The blessed Abo said to him, "Let your gold and silver remain with you for your own corruption. I do not seek human favours for I possess Christ's bounty, the crown of life incorruptible and grace eternal in heaven."

Then the judge ordered Abo's hands and feet to be bound with iron chains, and in this condition he was shut up in prison. But the saint was happy and gave thanks to the Lord, saying, "I thank Thee, O Lord, my God and Redeemer Jesus Christ, for making me worthy of endur-ing trial and imprisonment for Thy holy name." It was then Tuesday, December 27th, the commemoration of St. Stephen the disciple of Christ, first deacon and proto-martyr, and prince of all the martyrs; thus it fittingly befell that the prince of all martyrs, together with all the martyred host, should intercede for him, that this latest witness for Christ might not be prevented from being numbered among their glorious company!

So the blessed Abo stayed in his dungeon fasting and praying and singing psalms incessantly day and night. He performed deeds of charity, selling all his property to minister to the wants of his needy and famished fellow-prisoners. But the teachers of falsehood and the informers came to him and uttered words of cunning flattery: "Son, do not sacrifice yourself, do not bargain away your young life in exchange for Christianity or alienate yourself from your brothers and relatives, lest you bring evil on your own head, and make us all sad." Some of them threatened hint and said, "What use this Christ of yours be to you? Who is going to save you from our hands? For they are already getting fire and instruments of torture ready to be used on you if you do not turn to us."

Abo paid no attention to them, but went on praying and singing psalms silently in his mind. After they had gone on talking a long time he said, "It is no use haranguing me, for I am like a deaf man and have heard nothing, and like a dumb man who never opens his mouth; I have become like a man deprived of hearing, with whom it is quite useless to converse, for my hope is in the Lord. Leave me alone, you worthless people, so that I can seek out the commandments of my God." Since they could not shake this righteous man they went crestfallen away.

The blessed Abo remained in prison nine days, and spent all the daytime fasting and the nights in vigil until dawn, But on the ninth day he said to all the Christians and others who were with him in jail, "tomorrow is the day of my passing away, to be united with my Lord God Jesus Christ." For this fact was revealed by the Lord to His martyr.

After this he stripped off his clothes and gave them to be sold, so that they could buy candles and incense to burn for him; and these he distributed for burning in all the city churches. He also sent to ask all the priests to pray for bun, so that he might not be deflected from the Christian faith, but be made worthy of the calling of the Christian martyrs.

He passed the night before his solemn commemoration day in vigil, and lifted up two great candles in his hands and stood up in the middle of his prison. There he re-mained standing upright till dawn without respite, until he had finished reciting the Psalms and the candles had burnt away in his hands, which were fastened to his neck with iron chains. And as

lie stood steadfastly he spoke aloud, saying, "I will lift up my eyes unto the Lord, He is ever before me, for He is my right hand, that I may not falter," and the words that follow.

When the tenth lay dawned it was the 6th of Janu-ary, the commemoration of our Lord's baptism; and it was a Friday. And the blessed Abo said, "This is a great day for me, for I see the twofold victory of my Lord Jesus Christ, since it was on this day that He went down unclothed into the river Jordan to be baptized; and the heads of the monster hidden in those deep waters He annihilated by divine power. Now it is my turn today to vanquish the fears which beset my soul's fleshly covering, and go down into the city as into the sacred waters to be baptized in my own blood by fire and spirit, as John the Baptist preached. Then indeed I shall enter again into the waters to receive baptism, for it is today that the Holy Spirit goes out over all the waters, by which all Christ's faithful followers are baptized as in the river Jordan. When I am divested of my body, I shall revile and trample on the wily machinations which Satan has devised for me in this city.

"And again, it was on a Friday that my Lord Jesus Christ in His Passion, with His bands nailed to the Cross exposed the enemy of all mankind and put him to shame to all the ends of the earth. Now grant me too that I may take up the struggle against that foe of the Christ-ians, and by shedding my blood for Christ may turn him into an object of contempt and derision for all Christians because he imagined that he could estrange me by fear of death from the love of my Lord Jesus Christ. But I shall pour scorn on his plans and overcome him by Christ's grace and thus repay my twofold debt to my Saviour."

Then he asked for water and washed his face and anointed his head and said, "Once upon a time I myself was a skilled perfumer and mixer of fragrant oils. But today this is my anointing for the grave. From now on I shall no longer be anointed with this perishable oil of my petty nature, but as Solomon the Wise taught me in his Song of Songs, "I ran in the savour of Thy good oint-ments," O Christ, who filled me with the imperishable perfume of Thy faith and love. Thou knowest, O Lord, that I have loved Thee more than I have loved myself ."

When he had spoken these words he went into the holy church and they let him partake of the Holy Sacra-ment of Christ's Body and Blood. It was the third hour of his solemn festival day, and when he had partaken of the true and lifegiving mystery, he said, "I thank Thee, my Lord God Jesus Christ, who hast given me as pro-vision for my journey this life-imparting flesh of Thine, as well as Thy sacred blood to be my cheer and strength!

Now I know that Thou bast not abandoned me, hut art standing by me, and I by Thee. From now on I shall take no more of that other food from which one grows hungry again, nor of that other drink from which one thirsts again, but this is sufficient for me until the life eternal. Now though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou, O Lord, art with me."

As soon as he had said these words the judge's minions arrived, and he took leave of all the imprisoned Christ-ians and said, "Remember me in your prayers, for you will see me no more in this transitory world." And they attached chains to his feet and hands and brought him out through the town. The Christians and friends of his who saw him shed tears for his sake ; but St. Abo said to them, "Do not weep over me, but be glad, for I am going to my, Lord. Send me on my way with prayers, and may the peace of the Lord protect you !" But he went along like someone who is making a corpse to walk, for it was thus that he looked upon his body; and as he went along he repeated in his mind the 118th Psalm (#4) "Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord." After he had chanted this passage he repeated the words of that blessed robber, "Lord, remem-ber me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom."

In this way he arrived before the judgment seat of the Amir his judge; when he had come there, he boldly made the sign of the Cross over the gate, and crossed himself. Then they brought him before the magistrate, who said to him, "What is this, young man, what ideas have you got into your head?" But the holy martyr became filled with the Holy Ghost and said, "I have taken thought. and am a Christian."

The judge said to him, "Have not you abandoned your idiocy and folly?" The blessed Abo said to him, "Although I was once sunk in ignorance and foolishness, neverthe-less I later became worthy of Christ."

The judge said to him, "Do you not realize that with these words of yours, you have pronounced your own death sentence?" St. Abo replied, "If I die, I am con-vinced that I shall live with Christ. Why do you delay? Carry out your design upon me! For I am as firm as that wall against which you arc leaning; I do not listen to your futile words, for my mind is with Christ in heaven."

The judge said to him, "What is this delight granted to you from Christ, for the sake of which you do not even shrink

from death?" St. Abo said to him, "If you desire to know this delight, then believe in Christ your-self and he baptized in Him, and thereby you will become worthy to experience the delight he bestows."

Then the Amir became angry and ordered him to be taken out and beheaded. The attendants led him out from the bar of judgment into the palace courtyard and removed from him the irons which shackled his hands and feet. But the saint himself quickly tore off the robe in which he was clad; when he was naked he made the sign of the Cross over his face and body, saying, "I thank and bless Thee, O Holy Trinity, that Thou hast made me worthy to take part in the feats of Thy holy martyrs!" After saying this, he folded his arms cross-wise behind his back, and with a glad face and steadfast spirit invoked Christ and bowed down his neck to the sword.

Three times they struck him with the sword, for they thought that by fear of death, they might separate him from Christ; but the holy martyr looked on the sword in brave silence until he offered up his soul to the Lord.

When the foes of Christ who had denounced the saintly martyr saw that the blessed one's life was accomplished in Christ, that he had fought the good fight and had overcome their demented frenzy by his faith and constancy, they were even more filled with spite, and appeared in front of the tyrant and said, "We know that the Christians have a custom that if someone is executed for this Christ of theirs, they steal his body and give it honorable burial. And with fraudulent intent they publicly declare it to have miraculous healing powers and distribute the garments and the hair from its head as well as its bones as a talisman against sickness, and in this way they deceive a lot of ignorant people. Now order his body to be handed over for us to take out and burn with fire and scatter to the wind and confound the fraud of the Christians, so that they may all see and be afraid, and some of them be converted to our faith. Our people also would be deterred by this from turning to the doctrine of the Christians." Although they said this from spite towards the Christians they testified to the strict truth, since Christ's martyrs are a source of healing grace to all who draw near to them in Christ-given love and faith.

The judge answered, "Take it wherever you like, and do with it whatever you think best." Then they went and raised his sacred body from the ground and laid it in a portable box together with his clothes; from the earth they scooped up the blood that had been shed by this righteous one, leaving absolutely nothing upon the ground, and they poured it into a receptacle. They loaded the saint on to a cart, just like those forty steadfast saints for the place where they cut off the head of the holy martyr was by the portals of the holy church dedicated to the Forty! Saints (#5), so that it was fitting that he should be treated in the same way as those forty valiant holy martyrs had been.

After they had transported the saint's sacred body outside the town and taken it up to the spot which is called the Place of Lamentation - for it is there that the burial ground of the people of this town is situated - they took him off the cart and laid him on the ground. They collected firewood and straw and oil, and heaped it on to the holy body and set fire to it, until they had burnt the flesh of the holy martyr on that spot which is to the east of the city fortress which they call Sadilego ("the Dungeon"), at the edge of a cliff on the steep bank of the great river which flows eastwards from the city and is called the Kura (Mtkvari).

They did not let any of the Christians come near that place until they had finished burning the holy martyr's corpse. But the relics of the holy martyr, which they were unable to destroy by fire, they stuffed into a sheep-skin which they sewed up firmly and carried and threw into the great river, below the city bridge on which the venerable Cross of the Bridge was set up. And the river water became a winding sheet for those sacred relics and the depths of the waters a sepulchre for the holy martyr, so that no one should wantonly disturb them. Thus it was that Christ's foes acted, and thus that the blessed one completed his noble deeds of piety.

Then a multitude of Christians from the town assembled and set aside all dread of the tyrants and came out in a body to the place where they had burnt the corpse of the holy martyr. Old folk hurried along with their sticks, the lame hopped along like deer, youths came running, children raced each other, while the women were like those saintly bringers of perfume who ran to bring sweet ointments to the tomb of Christ our Lord - truly now they imitated them, for they ran with tears and brought with them candles and incense in their hands. All of them came joyfully, offering up thanks to Christ, and scooped up the earth at that spot and brought many who were afflicted by various diseases, and they were cured that same day.

But God Omnipotent showed His might still more greatly, and gave glory to His martyr and revealed a wondrous miracle so that all should know that this was a martyr of Christ. When that day was growing dim and it was the first hour of the night, the Lord set over that spot a flaming star like a fiery torch, which stood for a long time over the place where they had burnt the blessed martyr of Christ. It stood high up in the sky until the third hour of the night or longer, and gave

forth a brilliance that was like no earthly fire, but like a fear-some lightning flash, seen by all the townspeople, including the judge and all the local Christians and all the Saracens and travelers who had come from other lands. For a long time they gazed with the pupils of their eyes until the tyrants were put to shame; and some of the Saracen judge's attendants came out to look at that spot because they imagined the Christians might have lit the place up. When they drew near the spot they saw the star rising up higher in the air, and could not approach the place, for they were seized with the fear of God.

Again, on the second night a light still more wondrous issued from the river. The Saracens, amazed by this un-usual spectacle of heavenly fire between earth and sky, tried to conceal the marvel; yet no waters could quench it, nor could the furiously seething waves and depths put it out. Where they had hurled in the divinely con-secrated relics of the blessed martyr below the bridge, a light shone in the form of a pillar like a lightning flash, which continued bright for a long time. Both sides of the river were lit up, the craggy banks, and the bridges from top to bottom. This also was witnessed by the whole mul-titude of the townsfolk, so that all might be convinced that this was indeed a martyr of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and that everyone, whether believers in Christ or unbelievers, might understand that true is the word of the Lord when He said, "If anyone serve me, he will re-ceive honour from my Father, which is in heaven."

If now He showed such honour to Abo's perishable flesh, how much more shall we not see him honoured at the resurrection of the just, when he is crowned im-perishably among the angels in glory and exaltation? What shame for their demented frenzy will fall upon those who denied Christ and smote and persecuted and destroyed those saints of His whom then He will be ad-mitting into His heaven! But now, beloved, it behoves us all the more to cherish the memory of those first blessed martyrs, that through what we have witnessed of this new martyr we may believe also in those protomartyrs, and utter the words of the blessed David:

NOTES:

1. A high Byzantine court title, regulary bestowed on the ruling princec of Georgia, Armenia and other frontier states adjoining Byzantium.
2. Some manuscrites read "three days", wich is absurd when we consider the distance between the Volga and the Black Sea province of Abkhazia.
3. Thus is some of the manuscripts; however, the list of names of contemporary soverigns shows this date, corresponding to A.D. 915 is wrong, and that the year must in reality have been A.D.786.
4. In the English Psalter, Psalm 119.
5. These are the Forty Martyrs of Sebastia, to whom there is more than one reference in the Life of Peter the Iberian, above.

Upwards Home

email: umaximov@newmail.ru