Bishop Kirion

A letter from Karkoff No. 33 1909

Translated from Russian by Marjory Wardrop

You already have learnt from the newspapers that Bishop Kirion has once more been condemned and sent from the Kharkoff government to a lonely and solitary monastery. The sufferings of the aged bishop at this time are unimaginable. Why should they thus torture and pursue this man.

Bishop Kirion is a true sympathizer with his people. He is full of sincere love and a true Christian a true protector of the oppressed to whatever race they belong. This is the very reason for his merciless persecution and all the more as he bears everything in silence.

The first punishment of Bishop Kirion was his appointment to an insignificant place in Russia. Several years after circumstances changed and he was appointed to the first rank in the Bishoprie Orel. A short time afterward Kirion exchanged the Bishoperie of Orel for Sukhum with Bishop Dimitri. Hence Bishop Kirion was invited to the Synod discussion of the autocephaly of the Georgian Church. He defended warmly its autocephaly and displayed great knowledge of history, as Professor Butkjevitch , of Kharkoff University, afterwards informed us. At that time Prof. Butkevitch was an ardent opponent of Bishop Kirion. After this Bishop Kirion was again [pg 2] appointed to a small place at Kovno. He did not remain here long. Seeing that the highest spiritual circles looked on him with disapproval he resigned his bishoprie and asked permission to live at Mount Athos. Upon this the famous Vostorgoff said: “He wishes to live at Mt. Athos, so that he may intrigue with the Turks and remove Georgia from Russia” The Synod forbade him to live at Mt. Athos and sent him to Guriajhi’s Monastery near Kharkoff, where he took up his abode last year on April 25th. He was greatly consoled by a deputation of Georgian students, from Kharkoff University, who came to see him; he expressed his thanks for their sympathy in a beautiful speech.

Here Bishop Kirion’s lodging consisted of three underground cells so damp that water ran down the walls. No pension was assigned to him and he was content with the fare of a simple monk. In spite of this hard life, Bishop Kirion did not lose courage and

was consoled in the proximity of the University as he could use its library in addition to his own 5,000 volumes. Here he lived seven months and completed a new work in the Russian tongue, *The Civilizing Role of Iberia in the History of Russia*. Here also he made the acquaintance of various professors who were deeply interested in his new work and are anxious to hasten its publication.

Thus Bishop Kirion spent seven whole months in Curiajzi's Monastery, only in the 8th month on the 10th December, 1908 as we know, the deputy Purishkevitch [pg 3] publicly and falsely declared in the Duma that Bishop Kirion was present at meetings held in the house of the priest Chidjavadze on the 22nd February 1905 and 18th May 1905. These imaginary meetings were followed by the Exarch Nikon's murder and so on.. Do you not marvel, reader, at such strange falsehoods! First who has heard of these meetings and next how could Kirion be in Tiflis on Feb 22nd when he only resigned the Bishoprie of Kovno on March 9th and as for May 18th, I myself can witness that he was officiating in the Monastery of Kuriajhi and even blessed someone as abbot! Then where did Purishkevitch find such lies.

Nevertheless Purishkevitch's falsehood did its work and just two weeks after his speech on Dec. 26 the order came from the Synod that Bishop Kirion was to move from Guriajhi's monastery to Sanaxari's Monastery in the Bishoprie of Tamboff. Kirion wondered why and for what reason they should send him in midwinter to a still colder, more solitary monastery where the nearest railway station is 80 versts distant. He sent a telegram to the Synod and begged them to allow him to come to St. Petersburg and learn what had happened. A second telegram came: "The Synod consider it necessary that you should immediately travel to Sanaxaris Monastery. They do not give you permission to come to St. Petersburg."

The day after the receipt of this telegram a [pg 4] guard was set to watch him and the police were observing everything. All this had a bad influence on Kirion's broken health and he became very weak and almost gave himself up to despair. By the advice of the students he again sent a telegram to the Synod asking that on account of his feeble state of health he might be allowed to delay his departure till May or if not that he might be granted shelter in a monastery in the South. To this a still more peremptory reply came ordering him to leave at once for the appointed monastery. There was nothing for it but to

obey fate and on January 10th he set out. As he felt weakly I went as far as Moscow with him. I noticed that wherever we went there were strangers who watched and followed us like convicts.

In Moscow we saw Professor Khakhanashvili and Bishop Kirion showed him his new works which Khakhanashvili promised to have published. We also saw the famous N.N. Durnovo who was deeply grieved at this undeserved punishment and gave various counsel. As time passed Kirion became more and more ailing until Jan 16th, when he entered the Golilziu Hospital at one o'clock. On the 14th when I went to the Hospital I was informed that they had taken away the Bishop. The doctor informed me that the night before at two o'clock the police wanted to take away the Bishop but the hospital authority would not allow it. At 8 that morning the priestav came with his assistants [pg 5] and asked the doctor if it was possible or not for the Bishop to travel. The doctor replied that "although he was very weak it might be possible for him to travel." Upon this the priestav ordered the Bishop to dress quickly and to go with him. They put him in a carriage and drove away with him, the doctor did not know where or why.

I informed Professor Khakhanashvili of what had taken place and then N.N. Durnovo, who immediately hastened to learn the news. In a short time we heard that from the hospital Bishop Kirion had been taken direct to the railway station and sent to Sanaxari's Monastery in charge of two guards.

The next day I went to N.N. Durnovo's again and the old man was almost weeping at this severe treatment of the Bishop and wished to know if Georgian society could do nothing to save him. It is necessary, said N.N. Durnovo, that every Georgian bishop should enquire of the Government why Bishop Kirion is thus persecuted and when there will be an end of it. He also told me that today the assistant inspector of Moscow University Bogoianlevsky was speaking with Vostorgoff about Kirion's groundless persecution and Vostorgoff replied: "I will drown him and deluge all Georgia with blood." Upon this Mr. Balashoff, a member of Moscow newspaper who was present at the moment said: Bishop Kirion may complain [pg 6] of these words of Vostorgoff's and may call me as a witness. After this on my return to the Kursk railway station, gendarmes seized me, a police official related to me our journey and menacing me said tell me where you have been or I shall arrest you. It is all the same, we know everything.

If you know, rejoined I, then why is it necessary that I should tell you. They handed me [ticket?] and finally let me go.

Thus ended Bishop Kirion's journey.

G. Mousvenaridze