

TWO LETTERS OF ST JOHN CHRYSOSTOM¹To BRISO²

[From Cucusus, Summer 404.]

THE journey took nearly seventy days. You may tell from this what grave and continued trials I had to face; fear of Isaurians beset me constantly, and the bouts of fever I wrestled with were as much as I could bear. Now at last I am at Cucusus, the most desolate spot on earth. I say this with no wish to trouble anyone with endeavours to have me moved from here—the worst is over—I mean the hardships of the journey itself. I only ask you to do me the kindness of writing often and not to deprive me of this comfort now that I am so much further from you. When I myself am in difficulties and trouble, you know what a consolation it is to hear that all you who love me are well and cheerful and unmolested. Let me make the most of this source of pleasure; give me often such news as this. You will greatly revive my spirits and bring me much consolation; you need no telling what joy it is for me to know that all things are well with you.

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To OLYMPIAS³

[From Cucusus, Winter 404.]

To the revered Olympias, the deaconess, the beloved of God, John the Bishop sends greeting in the Lord.

Why this grieving and lamentation? Why enslave your soul to despondency and impose a punishment on yourself which your enemies had not in their power? The letter you sent me by Patricius reveals a much wounded mind, and I am deeply pained and distressed. You should do your utmost to banish these low spirits, not go about 'gathering melancholy reflections', 'conjuring up fancied evils' (I quote your own words), and wearing yourself down so purposelessly and dangerously. What distresses you? Your failure to get me removed from Cucusus? All that zealous endeavour could do to accomplish it has been done by you already; if events fall short of your designs, that is no reason for distress. Why lament for what is my source of triumph? You should rather be joyful, festive, exultant, that I should have been held worthy of something so far beyond my deserts. You are grieved at my loneliness here, you say? And yet life here is as pleasant as can be—I have

¹ A translation of an earlier letter of St John Chrysostom (to Pope Innocent I) was published in BLACKFRIARS in January, 1948.

² Migne 52, cols. 739-40.

³ Migne 52, cols. 612-19; D'Alton, *Selections from St Chrysostom*, pp. 344-51.

peace, calm, leisure, health. The village has no market or shops, but what matter? Everything comes to me in abundance, and the bishop here and Dioscorus both make my comfort their constant business. Patricius, excellent man, will assure you that I am none the less cheerful for being here or less contented or less well cared for.

Or if your distress comes from events at Caesarea, there again you are acting unworthily of yourself. These too were a source of glory and triumph for me, and my sufferings and expulsion have brought me praise and good words, wonder and admiration from every quarter. But I wish these matters to go no further now, much talked of though they are. I have been told by Paeanius that the priests of Pharetrius himself⁴ are now in the capital and have said that they remain in communion with me and have no communion, no dealings, no intercourse with my enemies. To save them vexation, let none of this go further. Indeed the straits I was put to were very grave, and if I had suffered no other distresses, the happenings there were enough to win me countless reward, for truly I was in mortal danger. I entreat you, keep these matters secret, and I will give you a brief account of them, not to distress but to fortify you. To make my path through such constant trials, to have them brought on me by those I least looked for—in this I see means to my profit and enrichment and the cancelling of my sins.

I was reaching Cappadocian territory, having just got free from Leontius⁵, who had all but threatened me with death. Men from Caesarea kept meeting me on the way. 'Bishop Pharetrius expects you', they said, 'he has been searching in all directions so as not to miss meeting you; he is doing everything in his power to be sure of seeing you and embracing you and showing you all affection; he has roused all the monasteries and convents.' Such news was unlike my expectations, for inwardly I foreboded the opposite; but of this I said nothing to those who brought the message.

To Caesarea I came at length, worn out and wasted, parched with fever, distraught and in great pain; I found an inn on the outskirts of the town, and was anxious to have a doctor and get relief for my burning limbs; my tertian fever was at its height. Apart from this, I was travel-worn and exhausted; I had lacked attention, doctors, requisites; I was spent with fatigue, heat and sleeplessness, and I entered the town more dead than alive. At that moment appeared all the priests of the town, with laymen and monks and nuns and doctors; I was overwhelmed with attentions, and everyone set about helping and serving me in all kinds of ways. But the

⁴ Bishop of Caesarea.

⁵ Bishop of Ancyra, who had taken an active part at the Synod of the Oak.

effects of the fever had not left me; I was overcome by heavy torpor, and remained in a very dangerous state, till little by little my illness began to mend. There was still no sign of Pharetrius; for some reason I do not understand he was waiting for me to leave the town.

When I saw my illness was slowly taking a turn for the better, I began to think of travelling on, wishing to reach Cucusus and make some recovery from the hardships of the journey. At this point came the sudden alarm that a great band of Isaurians were overrunning the region of Caesarea, having burned a large village and committed all manner of outrages. Upon this news the commandant gathered his men and sallied out. It was feared that the brigands would raid the town; everyone was in alarm and dismay at this threat to the native soil itself, and even the aged joined in manning the walls. When things were at this pass, suddenly just before dawn a rabble of monks (I choose the word to express their savagery) rushed up to the house where I was staying and threatened to fire and burn it and finish me if I did not leave. Neither the danger from the Isaurians nor my own grave condition nor anything else could mollify them; they raged at me with such violence that even the officers with me were terrified; the monks threatened to beat them, and boasted that in their time they had beaten plenty such, and shamefully too. At this the officers fled to me and begged and entreated: 'Even if we must meet the brigands, save us from such wild beasts as these'. The news reached the commandant; he rushed back to the house intending to help me. But he failed to make the monks hear reason; he was merely powerless.

Finding things desperate, and not daring to advise me either to leave the city for certain death or again to stay where I was when the monks made such furious threats, he sent to Pharetrius and begged him for a few days' respite in view of my illness and the danger outside the town. But this did not serve either; next day the monks were back there again, more violent than ever; nor had any of the priests courage enough to come forward and take my part; blushing with shame (for the bishop's wish was admitted to be behind all this), they hung back in hiding, and when I sent for them did not come. To be brief—in spite of such dangers ahead, in spite of what appeared certain death, in spite of the lingering effects of fever, at mid-day I tumbled into my litter and began the outward journey among the laments and cries of the whole people, who cursed the author of this outrage and wept and wailed together. When I was past the town, some of the priests began to come out, and sorrowfully escorted me. Hearing some of them ask the soldiers

'Where are you taking him—surely to certain death?', another priest (one of the most attached to me) said, 'I implore you, leave here; no matter if you encounter the brigands as long as you once get free from us. Whatever you chance upon, it will be safety, if once you escape our violence here.'

Hearing and seeing something of this, that admirable woman Seleucia, wife of Rufinus, who had already done much for me, asked and implored me to take up quarters at one of her country houses, five miles from the city; she sent servants to go there with me, and we made for the house. But not even there was I to be safe from intrigues. As soon as Pharetrius heard of it, he sent a most threatening message to Seleucia. She told me this afterwards. At the time when she gave me this hospitality I knew nothing of what had passed; she came out to see me, concealed the new threat from me, and gave orders to her steward there to provide me with every comfort, adding that should any monks approach with a view to insulting or assaulting me, he was to gather peasants from her other estates and offer armed resistance. She suggested too that I might go for safety to another manor-house of hers which was fortified and impregnable, and thus evade the violence of bishop and monks. I would have none of this and stayed in the first house, ignorant as I was of the later intrigues. The rage of my enemies was not to be balked so easily. As Seleucia tells me now, though I did not know it at the time, Pharetrius kept urging and threatening her, forcing her to expel me from even these outskirts of the town. His importunity overcame her at last. I still knew nothing of the true state of affairs, and she was ashamed to disclose the pressure put upon her; instead, she gave out in Caesarea that the barbarians had come. This was at midnight, and I was asleep in the country house. The priest Euethius came into my room and woke me; 'Get up', he cried, 'get up, I implore you; the barbarians have come; they are near here'. Imagine my state at such news. I said, 'But what can I do? I cannot go back to Caesarea; I should get worse treatment there than anything I can fear from the Isaurians'. Still he insisted that I must go.

There was no moon; it was midnight, black and murky. Here were fresh troubles, and no one was there to help me; everyone had left me already⁶. Nevertheless, prompted by fear and looking for death at any moment, I started off, worn out though I was, and ordered torches to be lighted. But the priest must have them put out again; the light, he said, might attract the Isaurians and bring them on us; so out went the torches. The path was rough,

⁶ Except the military escort, whose presence and whose resourcelessness are taken for granted.

steep and stony; and the mule that carried my litter fell on its knees and brought me down with it. I was very nearly killed, but got clear of the litter and groped my way round; Euethius sprang from his mule and supported me, and with him to lead me or rather pull me I struggled on; walking there could be none, on ground so rough and mountainous and in the depth of the night.

Picture my feelings through these mishaps; the fever was still upon me; I did not know I had been imposed upon⁷; I was in fear and trembling of the brigands, and expected to fall into their hands. Do you not think that even if nothing else befell me, these sufferings alone might cancel a number of my transgressions as well as bringing me good repute? The truth was, I think, that as soon as I had reached Caesarea, everyone there—the authorities, those who in earlier years had been governors or prefects⁸ or tribunes, the people in general—had come daily to see me, looked after me, made me the apple of their eye; this, I suppose, had stung Pharetrius, and the jealousy that drove me from Constantinople dogged me at Caesarea too; I say I suppose this—I suspect it but will not assert it. How can I describe the rest of the journey, with all its alarms and perils? Yet daily when I recall it and dwell on it I am carried away with very delight and feel the exultation of one who has a great store of treasure; such is truly my mood and mind. And I urge you too, dear lady, to rejoice and be glad at all this, to exult and to glorify God who has held me worthy of these sufferings. But I must ask you to keep all this secret and divulge it to no one, even if my escort should fill the capital with their talk of it (for they too were in danger of their lives). No; as far as you are concerned let no one be the wiser; rather discourage any who speak of it.

If you are anxious over the after-effects of my hardships, let me assure you that I am quite free of them, and am stronger now than I was in the city. Nor need the extreme cold alarm you. My house has been equipped to meet it and Dioscorus goes to great pains to prevent my feeling the cold at all. And to judge by my first acquaintance with it, the climate here at this season seems to have an eastern quality, as warm and as mild as Antioch's. But I was greatly distressed to find you saying: 'Perhaps you are vexed with me for neglecting you'. I wrote to you many days ago asking you not to have me removed. But I might well consider excuse was needed—I might think you would be very hard put to it to justify such expressions at all. Or is it some justification that you

⁷ By the false alarm of Isaurian brigands, which Euethius also took for truth.

⁸ Here the MSS. add 'rhetoricians'—probably a gloss, as Professor Tierney suggests.

should write, 'My wish to intensify my sorrow was doubtless father to such a thought'? This again, I think, puts you greatly in the wrong; you say, 'I regale my thoughts with melancholy'. It is your duty to do your utmost to banish this dejection, instead of which you do as the devil wishes you, nursing grief and despondency. Surely you know what a dangerous thing despondency is?

As for the Isaurians, you may set your mind at rest. They have returned to their quarters—the governor has made sure of that; and I am a great deal safer than I was at Caesarea. My only fear now is of the bishops (one or two excepted). So have no alarms about the Isaurians; they have retreated, and now that the winter has set in they have shut themselves up at home; if they come out again, it will not be till after Whitsuntide. But why do you say that you miss the comfort of my letters? I have sent you three already, one by the officers of my escort, one by Antony and one by your servant Anatolius—long ones, all of them; two especially⁹ are restoratives which should revive and quite reinvigorate the most despairing and wounded spirit. Take these and go through them from beginning to end; you will find them a beneficial cure and a powerful aid, and will be able to tell me that you are the better for them. I have ready a third on the same lines, but have decided not to send it now, grieved as I am by the words of your letter—'I keep gathering up melancholy reflections and conjuring up fancied evils'—expressions unworthy of you which make me hide my face for shame. But read the letters and you will cease to talk so, however bent you may be on reaching despair.

You have mentioned Bishop Heracleides; it is open to him if he desires it to bring his case before a court¹⁰ and so be rid of his difficulties; there is no other course left. Though I myself have not achieved much, I have asked Pentadia to do her best to contrive some relief for him in his troubles. You say you 'make bold to tell me of the distressing news' because he himself has asked you to. What boldness is there here? I have never ceased and never shall cease to say that the one distressing thing is sin—everything else is dust and smoke. What hardship is it to live in prison and be in chains? What hardship is suffering of any kind when suffering leads to such reward? What hardship is exile or confiscation? These are mere words with nothing formidable behind them, with no edge of real sorrow to them. If you speak of death, you speak of the debt of nature, which even if not forestalled must in any case be met; if you speak of exile, you speak only of

⁹ Letters 2 and 3 of the complete collection.

¹⁰ The meaning here is uncertain; a suggested emendation would give the sense 'abdiccate'.

changing this place for that and seeing many cities; if you speak of confiscation, you speak of deliverance and disencumbrance.

Then there is Bishop Maruthas. Spare no effort with him—continue to give him your attention and try to rescue him from danger.¹¹ I need his help in regard to Persian affairs especially. Learn from him, if you can, what success he has had in Persia and why he is in the capital; and let me know if you have handed him the two letters I wrote for him. If he is willing to write to me, I will write to him again; if not, perhaps he will tell you privately how things in Persia have gone and if his return there is likely to be worth while. I was anxious to meet him on that account. In any case do your best, and perform your share even if everyone else plunges headlong. Your reward will await you. Make a friend of the bishop, and do your utmost.

Pray do not pass over what follows, but handle the matter with special care. The Gothic monks of Marsia, with whom Bishop Serapion was long in hiding, have told me of a visit from Moduarius the deacon; he brought news that Unilas, the admirable bishop whom I consecrated and sent to their country not long ago, has fallen asleep after much great work accomplished; the deacon brought also a letter from the King of the Goths asking to have a bishop sent them. In view of the trouble threatening I can see no more hopeful plan than delay and postponement; it is out of the question for them at present to sail to the Bosphorus or those parts. Try to contrive it then that they wait over the winter; but by no means put the matter aside, for it is one in which success means much. I have two great anxieties (though I hope that events may prove them groundless); one is that a bishop might be chosen by the authors of the present troubles, who have no authority to choose one; the other is that the choice might be made quite carelessly (you know yourself that they are far from concerned to choose a worthy man). Should my fears be justified—which God forbid!—you know the consequences; spare no effort then to prevent this. If it could be brought about that Moduarius should visit me in secret and unobserved, the gain would be inestimable; but if that is impossible, do what circumstances allow. What is true of money and was true with the widow is true of our actions also. Just as she with her gift of two mites surpassed all the rest with their greater gifts because she emptied out all she had, so those who strive to accomplish something with all their might have, as

¹¹ Literally, 'draw him out of the pit'. This missionary bishop, a Goth by birth, was not at home among the intrigues of the capital, and might be beguiled by Chrysostom's enemies.

far as in them lies, done everything, even if no success follow; and they have their reward laid up for them.

I am deeply grateful to Bishop Hilarius. He wrote to me asking my leave to go back to his diocese, set things right there, and then return. Since his presence is important (he is a holy man, zealous and indefectible) I have bidden him go and return quickly. Take care that my letter to him is delivered early and safely and is not thrown aside; he asked most urgently for a letter, and his presence is important. So be most careful with the letters that I enclose; if the priest Helladius is not with you, choose some other intelligent man with his wits about him, and make sure that the letters reach my friends.

Translated by WALTER SHEWRING.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

THE economic crisis with which Britain is faced today has very little to do either with Tory Misrule before the war or with Socialist Mismanagement since. It is to some extent due to the loss of most of our overseas investments during the war; but it is mainly due to the fact that we are finding it more and more difficult to export our manufactures in exchange for food and raw materials. More than a hundred years ago Disraeli declared that 'the continent will not suffer England to become the workshop of the world', and he was right in spite of the fact that during the latter part of the nineteenth century we grew wealthy by exporting our manufactures in exchange for cheap food. The situation today is very different. The rest of the world is becoming more and more industrialised and the world is short of food. The ruthless exploitation of virgin forests and farmlands has resulted in erosion in five continents so that yields are going down and land is passing out of cultivation. At the same time populations are increasing and there is somewhat greater equality of income so that the effective demand for food is increasing. The result is that the terms of trade are moving against us. We are having and shall have to pay more in manufactures for what food we cannot produce at home and for the raw materials we need to keep our factories going.

In the long run it is probable that emigration will be necessary. In the short run we have to produce more so as to pay for essential imports of food and raw materials and shall probably also have to consume less. It was in order to enable us to sell more abroad and pay for essential imports that the pound was devalued last