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History of the First Council of Nice: A World's Christian Convention, A.D. 325 ; with a Life of Constantine (1880)

Dean Dudley

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Dean Dudley (1823-1906) was a lawyer and New England antiquarian and miscellaneous writer who was born at Kingfield, a small new town in Maine. At the age of twelve, he was left to his own resources; but by industry and economy was able to obtain a sufficient education, when he was eighteen years old, to procure a certificate of his ability and qualification to teach a common school. He was admitted to the Suffolk bar in 1854, and for five or six years practised his profession in Boston. In 1860, he published a History of the First Council of Nice.

The First Council of Nicae was a council of Christian bishops convened in Nicaea in Bithynia by the Roman Emperor Constantine I in AD 325. This first ecumenical council was the first effort to attain consensus in the church through an assembly representing all of Christendom. It was presided over by Hosius of Corduba, a bishop from the West.

Its main accomplishments were settlement of the Christological issue of the nature of the Son of God and his relationship to God the Father, the construction of the first part of the Creed of Nicaea, establishing uniform observance of the date of Easter, and promulgation of early canon law.

Mr. Dudley has collected much valuable matter in relation to this important chapter in the history of Christianity. We do not remember to have seen elsewhere so full a list of the bishops who attended this council. The author prefaces his work with a life of Constantine the Great, the first christian emperor of the Roman world which extended over a great part of Europe, Asia and Africa; who established Christianity as the legal religion, and stopped the persecution which had raged till his time. All the decrees of the Council of Nice were raised by Constantine to be laws of the empire. By it twenty canons and the Nicene creed, including the doctrine of the trinity, were settled, and Sunday was recognized as the legal day of rest.

In the book before us the condition, doctrines and peculiarities of the christian church at the time of the Council of Nice (A.D. 325) are particularly described, in the language of the original authors and eye witnesses. The work is written in an impartial spirit.

Dudley writes:
"There were many Councils held in Christendom before that of Nice; but they were not Ecumenical, that is, general or universal. At the first Councils the bishops probably represented only their several churches, but they gradually assumed more extensive powers, and claimed to represent larger districts.

"In this history of a single Council we shall obtain a glimpse of the condition of the Christian Church of that day, Constantine, the great emperor of Rome, being decidedly the most conspicuous figure in the picture."

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