

THE TWLEVE APOSTLES

BY

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ALL good Christians, indeed all Christians — for are there any who are not models of goodness? — will desire that their fellow-creatures who are unbelievers should have the fullest possible information, biographical or otherwise, as to the twelve persons specially chosen by Jesus to be his immediate followers. The believer, of course, would be equally content with his faith in the absence of all historic vouchers. Indeed a pious worshipper would cling to his creed not only without testimony in its favor, but despite direct testimony against it. It is to those not within the pale of the church that I shall seek to demonstrate the credibility of the history of the twelve apostles. The short biographical sketch here presented is extracted from the first five books of the New Testament, two of which at least are attributed to two of the twelve. It is objected, by heretical men who go as far in their criticisms on the Gospels as Colenso does with the Pentateuch, that not one of the gospels is original or written by any of the apostles; that, on the contrary, they were preceded by numerous writings, since lost or rejected, these in their turn having for their basis the oral tradition which preceded them. It is alleged that the four gospels are utterly anonymous, and that the fourth gospel is subject to strong suspicions of spuriousness. To use on this part of the words of the author of “Supernatural Religion,” applied by him to the Acts of the Apostles: “As a general rule, any documents so full of miraculous episodes and supernatural occurrences would, without hesitation, be characterized as fabulous and incredible, and would not, by any sober-minded reader, be for a moment accepted as historical. There is no other testimony.” It would be useless to combat, and I therefore boldly ignore these attacks on the authenticity of the text, and proceed with my history. The names of the twelve are as follows — Simon, surnamed Peter; Andrew, his brother; James and John, the sons of Zebedee; Andrew, Philip; Bartholomew; Matthew; James, the son of Alphæus; Simon, the Canaanite; Judas Iscariot; and a twelfth, as to whose name there is some uncertainty; it was either Lebbæus, Thaddæus, or Judas. It is in Matthew alone (x, 3) that the name of Lebbæus is mentioned thus — “Lebbæus, whose surname was Thaddæus.” We are told, on this point, by able Biblicists, that the early MSS have not the words “whose surname was Thaddæus,” and that these words have probably been inserted to reconcile the gospel according to Matthew with that attributed to Mark. How good must have been the old fathers who sought to improve upon the Holy Ghost by making clear that which inspiration had left doubtful! In the English version of the Rheims Testament used in

this country by our Roman Catholic brethren, the reconciliation between Matthew and Mark is completed by omitting the words “Lebbæus whose surname was,” leaving only the name “Thaddæus” in Matthew’s text. This omission must be correct, being by the authority of an infallible church, and Dr. Newman shows us that when the church pronounces all doubt is damnable. If Matthew x, 3, and Mark iii, 18, be passed as reconciled, although the first calls the twelfth disciple Lebbæus, and the second gives him the name Thaddæus, there is yet the difficulty that in Luke vi, 16, corroborated by John xiv, 22, there is a disciple spoken of as “Judas, . . . not Iscariot.” “Judas, *the brother* of James.” Commentators have endeavored to clear away this last difficulty by declaring that Thaddæus is a Syriac word, having much the same meaning as Judas. This has been answered by the objection that if Matthew’s Gospel uses Thaddæus in lieu of Judas, then he ought to speak of Thaddæus Iscariot, which he does not; and it is further objected also that while there are some grounds for suggesting a Hebrew original for the gospel attributed to Matthew, there is not the slightest pretence for alleging that Matthew wrote in Syriac. It is to be hoped that the unbelieving reader will not stumble on the threshold of his study because of a little uncertainty as to a name. What is in a name? The Jewish name which we read as Jesus is really Joshua, but the name to which we are most accustomed seems the one we should adhere to.

Simon Peter being the first named amongst the disciples of Jesus, deserves the first place in this notice. The word “Simon” may be rendered, if taken as a Greek name, *flat-nose* or *ugly*. Some of the ancient Greek and Hebrew names are characteristic of peculiarities in the individual, but no one now knows whether Peter’s nose had anything to do with his name. Simon is rather a Hebrew name, but Peter is Greek, signifying a rock or stone. Peter is supposed to have the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and his second name may express his stony insensibility to all appeals by infidels for admittance to the celestial regions. Lord Byron’s “*Vision of Judgment*” is the highest known authority as to Saint Peter’s celestial duties, but this nobleman’s poems are only fit for very pious readers. Peter, ere he became a parson, was by trade a fisher, and when Jesus first saw Peter, the latter was in a vessel fishing with his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea of Galilee. The calling of Peter and Andrew to the apostleship was sudden, and apparently unexpected. Jesus walking by the sea said to them — “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matthew iv, 18-22) The two brothers did so, and they became Christ’s disciples. The successors of Peter have since reversed the apostle’s early practice: instead of now casting their nets into the sea, the modern representatives of the disciples of Jesus draw the seas into their nets, and, it is believed, find the result much more

profitable. When Jesus called Peter no one was with him but his brother Andrew; a little further on the two sons of Zebedee were in a ship with their father mending nets. This is the account of Peter's call given in the gospel according to Matthew, and as according to the Church Matthew was inspired by the Holy Ghost, who is identical with God the Father, who is one with God the Son, who is Jesus, the account must be free from error. In the Gospel according to John, which is likewise inspired in the same manner, from the same source, and with similar infallibility, we learn that Andrew was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, and that when Andrew first saw Jesus Peter was not present, but Andrew went and found Peter who, if fishing, must have been angling on land, telling him "we have found the Messiah," and that Andrew then brought Peter to Jesus, who said: "Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas; thou shalt be called Cephas." There is no mention in this gospel narrative of the sons of Zebedee being a little further on, or of any fishing in the sea of Galilee. This call is clearly on land, whether or not near the sea of Galilee does not appear. In the Gospel according to Luke, which is as much inspired as either of the two before-mentioned gospels, and, therefore, equally authentic with each of them, we are told (Luke v, 1-11) that when the call took place Jesus and Peter were both at sea. Jesus had been preaching to the people, who, pressing upon him, he got into Simon's ship, from which he preached. After this he directed Simon to put out into the deep and let down the nets. Simon answered: "Master, we have toiled all night, and taken nothing; nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net." No sooner was this done than the net was filled to breaking, and Simon's partners, the two sons of Zebedee, came to help, when, at the call of Jesus, they brought their ships to land, and followed him. From these accounts the unbeliever may learn that when Jesus called Peter either both Jesus and Peter were on the land, or one was on land and the other on the sea, or both of them were at sea. He may also learn that the sons of Zebedee were present at the time, having come to help to get in the great catch, and were called with Peter; or that they were further on, sitting mending nets with their father, and were called afterwards; or that they were neither present nor near at hand. He may also be assured that Simon was in his ship when Jesus came to call him, and that Jesus was on land when Andrew, Simon's brother, found Simon and brought him to Jesus to be called. The unbeliever must not hesitate because of any apparent incoherence or contradiction in the narrative. The greater the difficulty in believing, the more deserved the reward which only comes to belief. With faith it is easy to harmonise the three narratives above quoted, especially when you know that Jesus had visited Simon's house before the call of Simon, (Luke iv, 38) but did not go to Simon's house until after Simon had been

called (Matthew viii, 14). Jesus went to Simon's house and cured his wife's mother of a fever. Robert Taylor,¹ commenting on the fever-curing miracle, says — "St. Luke tells us that this fever had taken the woman, not that the woman had taken the fever, and not that the fever was a very bad fever, or a yellow fever, or a scarlet fever, but that it was a great fever — that is, I suppose, a fever six feet high at least; a personal fever, a rational and intelligent fever, that would yield to the power of Jesus's argument, but would never have given way to James's powder. So we are expressly told that Jesus rebuked the fever — that is, he gave it a good scolding; asked it, I dare say, how it could be so unreasonable as to plague the poor old woman so cruelly, and whether it wasn't ashamed of itself; and said, perhaps, *Get out, you naughty wicked fever, you*; and such like objurgatory language, which the fever, not being used to be rebuked in such a manner, and being a very sensible sort of fever, would not stand, but immediately left the old woman in high dudgeon." This Robert Taylor, although a clergyman of the Church of England, has been convicted of blasphemy and imprisoned for writing in such wicked language about the Bible. Simon Peter, as a disciple, performed many miracles, some when in company with Jesus, and more when separately by himself. These miracles, though themselves unvouched by any reliable testimony, and disbelieved by the people amongst whom they were worked, are strong evidence in favor of the apostolic character claimed for Peter.

On one occasion the whole of the disciples were sent away by Jesus in a ship, the Savior remaining behind to pray. About the fourth watch of the night, when the ship was in the midst of the sea, Jesus went unto his disciples, walking on the sea. Though Jesus went unto his disciples, and, as an expeditious way, I suppose, of arriving with them, he would have passed by them, but they saw him, and supposing him to be a spirit, cried out. Jesus bid them be of good cheer, to which Peter answered, (Matthew xiv, 28) "Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee." Jesus said, "Come," and Peter walked on the water to go to Jesus. But the sea being wet and the wind boisterous, Peter became afraid, and instead of walking on the water began to sink into it, and cried out "Lord save me," and immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter.

Some object that the two gospels according to John and Mark, which both record the feat of water-walking by Jesus, omit all mention of Peter's attempt. Probably the Holy Ghost had good reasons for omitting it. A profane mind might make a jest of an Apostle "half seas over," and ridicule an apostolic gatekeeper who could not keep his head above water.

Peter's partial failure in this instance should drive away all unbelief, as the text will show that it was only for lack of faith that

Peter lost his buoyancy. Simon is called Bar-Jonah, that is, son of Jonah, but I am not aware that he is any relation to the Jonah who lived under water in the belly of a fish three days and three nights.

It was Simon Peter who, having told Jesus he was the Son of God, was answered "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah, flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee." (Matthew xvi, 17) We find a number of disciples shortly before this, and in Peter's presence, telling Jesus that he was the Son of God, (Matthew xiv, 33) but there is, of course, no real contradiction between the two texts. It was on this occasion that Jesus said to Simon, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven." Under these extraordinary declarations from the mouth of God the Son, the Bishops of Rome have claimed, as successors of Peter, the same privileges, and their pretensions have been acceded to by some of the most powerful monarchs of Europe.

Under this claim the Bishops, or Popes of Rome, have at various times issued Papal Bulls, by which they have sought to bind the entire world. Many of these have been very successful; but in 1302, Philip the Fair, of France, publicly burned the Pope Boniface's Bull after an address in which the States-General had denounced, in words more expressive than polite, the right of the Popes of Rome to Saint Peter's keys on earth. Some deny that the occupiers of the episcopal seat in the seven-hilled city are really of the Church of Christ, and they point to the bloody quarrels which have raged between men, contending for the Papal dignity. They declare that those Vicars of Christ have more than once resorted to fraud, treachery, and murder, to secure the Papal dignity. They point to Stephen VII, the son of an unmarried priest, who cut off the head of his predecessor's corpse; to Sergius III, convicted of assassination; to John X, who was strangled in the bed of his paramour Theodora; to John XI, son of Pope Sergius III, famous only for his drunken debauchery; to John XII, found assassinated in the apartments of his mistress; to Benedict IX, who both purchased and sold the Pontificate; to Gregory VII, the pseudo lover of the Countess Matilda, and the author of centuries of war carried on by his successors. And if these suffice not, they point to Alexander Borgia, whose name is but the echo of crime, and whose infamy will be as lasting as history. It is answered: "By the fruit ye shall judge of the tree." It is useless to deny the vine's existence because the grapes are sour. Peter, the favored disciple, it is declared was a rascal, and why not his successors? They have only to repent, and there is more joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine righteous men. Such language is

very terrible, and arises from allowing the carnal reason too much freedom.

All true believers will be familiar with the story of Peter's sudden readiness to deny his Lord and teacher in the hour of danger, and will easily draw the right moral from the mysterious lesson here taught; but unbelievers may be a little inclined to agree with the common infidel objections on this point. These objections, therefore, shall be first stated, and then refuted in the most orthodox fashion. It is objected that all the denials were to take place before the cock should crow, (Matthew xxvi, 34; Luke xxii, 34; John xiii, 38) but that only one denial actually took place before the cock crew (Mark xiv, 68). That the first denial by Peter that he knew Jesus, or was one of his disciples, was at the door to the damsel, (John xviii, 17) but was inside while sitting by the fire, (Luke xxii, 57) that the second denial was to a man, and apparently still sitting by the fire (Luke xvii, 58), but was to a maid when he was gone out into the porch. That these denials, or at any rate, the last denial, were all in the presence of Jesus (Luke xvii, 61), who turned and looked at Peter, but that the first denial was at the door, Jesus being inside the palace, the second denial out in the porch, Jesus being still inside (Mark xiv, 69), and the third denial also outside. The refutation of these paltry objections is so simple, that any little child could give it, and none but an infidel would need to hear it, we therefore refrain from penning it. None but a disciple of Paine, or follower of Voltaire, would permit himself to be drawn to the risk of damnation on the mere question as to when some cock happened to crow, or as to the particular spot on which a recreant apostle denied his master. It is the merest justice to Peter to add that his disloyalty to Jesus was shared by his co-apostles. When Jesus was arrested "all the disciples forsook him and fled" (Matthew xxvi, 56). The true believer may sometimes be puzzled that Peter should so deny Jesus after he, Peter, had seen (Matthew xvii, 3-5) Moses and Elias, who had been dead many centuries, talking with Jesus, and had heard "a voice out of the cloud which said, this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." The unbeliever must not allow himself to be puzzled by this. Two of the twelve apostles, whose names are not given, saw Jesus after he was dead, on the road to Emmaus, but they did not know him; towards evening they knew him, and he vanished out of their sight. In broad daylight they did not know him, at evening time they knew him. While they did not know him they could see him, when they did know him they could not see him. Well may true believers declare that the ways of the Lord are wonderful. One of the apostles, Thomas, called Didymus, set the world an example of unbelief. He disbelieved the other disciples when they said to him, "we have seen the Lord," and required to see Jesus, though dead, alive in the flesh, and touch the body of his crucified

master. Thomas the apostle had his requirements complied with — he saw, he touched, and he believed. The great merit is to believe without any evidence — “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, he that believeth not shall be damned.” How it was that Thomas the apostle did not know Jesus when he saw him shortly after near the sea of Tiberias, is another of the mysteries of the Holy Christian religion. The acts of the apostles after the death of Jesus deserve treatment in a separate paper; the present essay is issued to aid the members of the Church Congress in their endeavors to stem the rising tide of infidelity.

ENDNOTES

¹ “Devil’s Pulpit,” vol. i, p. 148.

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