

## THE GROUP OF THE APOSTLES.

### II. PETER.

WE have seen how consistent and lifelike are the various incidents recorded of the group of the apostles, and how matter of fact and unidealized is the conception of them. And since the story of our Lord is supported by exactly the same evidence, we have concluded that what verifies the former is a testimony to the latter as well.

We now turn to those individuals among the Twelve concerning whom enough is recorded to give them shape and colour; and we ask how it stands with them. Are they real persons, or demigods, or shadows? And where we can find incidents related of them by more than one evangelist, do these incidents harmonize?

For it is quite certain that if the historians have given any rein whatever to their fancy, they will have been carried in very different directions. The Socrates of Plato and of Xenophon, the Cyrus of three narrators, the Cæsar of Plutarch and of Shakespeare, are sufficiently unlike to establish this proposition. Where a real life is honestly and accurately depicted there will yet be variety, because each author will be impressed by traits congenial to his own character; and this is the reason why our idea of Jesus is formed of contributions from four sources. But these varieties will blend, like the colours in a beam of light, into one harmonious effect.

Foremost of the Twelve, not only in station but also in force and vigour of delineation, is Simon the son of Jonas, to whose whole life that may be applied which is written of the sins of some, that it goes before him unto judgment, so clear and transparent is the import of all the record, so unequivocal for good or evil.

What image does our mind call up at the name of the greatest of the apostles? We think of a man in middle life, of whom it may be said equally, "When thou wast young" and "when thou shalt be old," and whose wife's mother retains sufficient vigour, when relieved from illness, to arise and minister to his guests (John xxi. 18; Matt. viii. 15). A weatherbeaten man, not unused to whole nights of toil and to wrestling with the whirlwinds that rage upon the Lake of Galilee (Luke v. 5; John vi. 18). A hasty man, who first quits the ship and then observes how wild the waves are, who rashly answers for the payment of tribute by his master, who strikes with the sword while others crave directions,<sup>1</sup> and who plunges into the waters rather than await the slow movement of a ship which drags a heavy net (Matt. xiv. 30, xvii. 24; Luke xxii. 49; Matt. xxvi. 51; John xxi. 7). A helpful man, the one who draws that same net ashore when all are bidden to bring of the fish which they have caught, and whose ship, rather than another, Jesus will choose to enter when He would fain be removed a little from the throng (John xxi. 11; Luke v. 3). By no means a penniless labourer for hire, but one of a company who possessed two ships,<sup>2</sup> and, besides the five partners, employed hired servants enough to carry on the trade when four of its members were withdrawn (Luke v. 1-11; Mark i. 20). An unlearned and ignorant man, according to the standard of technical acquirement at Jerusalem; yet not unable to address Cornelius in Greek, and (unless he employed a secretary) to correspond with his Churches in epistles very fairly worded (Acts iv. 13, x.). An affectionate man, sharing his house, although married, with his brother Andrew, and also with his wife's mother, for whom not

<sup>1</sup> Lange has missed a point for once, by making it Peter who asks for orders. *Life of Christ*, Clarke's translation, iii. 226.

<sup>2</sup> Probably not more, since their partners were summoned to help from "the other ship," not merely from another.

only he but all the group besought Jesus; one whose wife was content, a little later, to go with him in the labours of his apostolic wanderings; who could make to his Master the pathetic appeal, "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee" (Mark i. 29; Luke iv. 38; 1 Cor. ix. 5; John xxi. 17). For, in truth, a reproachful glance from that beloved One had almost broken his heart. A genial, simple, and unsuspecting nature, outspoken rather than profound, the first to be led to Jesus by a disciple already won, and the easiest to bring; capable of a great fall, but quick to obtain the relief of tears, and already sufficiently recovered to hasten to the sepulchre upon the first tidings of a further change (John i. 41; Matt. xxvi. 75; John xx. 3). A rough man, betraying his province by his dialect, and liable to relapse, in a moment of great pressure and peril, into the coarse language of the market (Matt. xxvi. 74). A man who was quickly rather than delicately sensitive; for when John would not intrude upon his Master, then troubled in spirit, by searching out the traitor, Peter had no sympathy with such a fine reserve, but beckoned to him to ask the question; whereupon it was the immediate task of the Divine tact of Jesus to remove Judas from the room (John xiii. 24). Peter himself was quite ready to repay in kind the service thus rendered him by John; for the fourth gospel pointedly connects this incident with the fact that Peter, when his risen Master had drawn him aside, seeing John modestly and unobtrusively following, called attention to the silent one by asking, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John xxi. 20, 21.) Perhaps there is not in the gospels a more characteristic phrase, so generous in its desire to introduce the wistful brother into the discourse, so wilful in its assumption that Jesus was overlooking "this man," so prosaic, even to shallowness, in its failure to be duly impressed and solemnized by the withdrawal of the veil from his own future and by the

stern prospect revealed. Is it conceivable that St. John should have made such an answer to such a warning, or even that he should have "turned about" at all to see who followed? This was the point of our Lord's rebuke in answer: Peter had nothing at such a time to do with others; let him see that his own heart was strong. Once he had asked, "Why cannot I follow Thee now?" and had since found by sore experience that he was still unready to follow Jesus. Now he is reminded that the same task still lies before him, and should have the first place in his mind. The days are past when he might go whither he would: henceforth he is in the hands of stronger and overmastering forces; and yet he may be free in the midst of coercions, if only it is his will to follow Jesus, the Cross-bearer.

Such was he to whom the keys were given, and to whom Jesus especially committed the task of strengthening his brethren. Yet one can easily conceive a more elevated character than his. St. John was probably a greater man, assuredly a greater thinker, his insight more penetrating, his mental grasp more powerful. But the greatness of the sage, and even of the man, is one thing, and the special greatness of the apostle is quite another thing. The question was not of inventing a religion, like Mohammad or the Buddha; nor of elaborating a theology, like Calvin or Augustine; nor even of working out, like St. Paul, the problem of its relations to the Gentile world. What is required is a mind upon which a few great conceptions could be strongly stamped, a heart which would respond with ardour to the appeal of love and loveliness in wholly novel manifestations, and a life which might often err, it is true, but was capable of a great surrender and a genuine loyalty, and frank, warm, and outspoken enough to convey its emotions vigorously to other men. The world would not

be converted (though the Church once founded might be edified exceedingly) by deep and silent reveries and profound views of truth. Not a sage but an interpreter was needed. And it will appear that while Peter and John were constantly together, in every case the initiative was taken by the first.

Let us now see how this conception of a simple and loyal soul, easily impressed, ready to express itself, and well fitted to spread the contagion of its ardour, is worked out by the different evangelists in detail.

When first we come upon him, he is one of a circle in which the Baptist has inspired the highest hope, and Andrew needs only to tell him, "We have found the Messiah," in order to bring him to Jesus. With him the Divine wisdom at once takes the initiative, and reading his character announces that "thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation a stone," a mass from the living Rock. What is said of him is not, as presently of Nathanael, what he already was; on the contrary, Jesus (who is now acting, for the first time, as only Jehovah does in the Old Testament) bestows a new name which will best express the especial blessing in store for the want of Simon. And he gives Peter no opportunity for a rash utterance, but looks him through and promptly speaks a strong word, fitted to burn deep into a sensitive heart (John i. 42).

His quick impressibility appeared, in different ways, at the first miraculous draught of fish, when he prostrated himself, and cried "Depart from me," and when, with a shudder, he said, "This shall never be unto Thee," "minding" things in their earthly aspect, but with only too vivid apprehension (Luke v. 8; Matt. xvi. 22). So, too, the waves, in his strange position as he walked on them to Jesus, and our Lord's surrender to His foes, and the hostile crowd in the palace, and long afterwards the frown of his compatriots

from Jerusalem, whose displeasure while distant he had defied, all came home to his keen susceptibilities with perilous and misleading power (Matt. xiv. 30 ; Luke xxii. 53 ; Mark xiv. 66 ; Gal. ii. 12).

Closer observation will detect, beside this well known impetuosity in action, a restless craving to act, an inability to "be still and see salvation," in every crisis a feeling that he must do something, even if he can discover no deed fitting the occasion. There was in him a certain absence of repose, which involved him in many of his troubles, yet indicated zeal and self-reliance.

Upon the Mount of Transfiguration we are surprised to learn what followed because he knew not what to say. Silence one would expect, but it is not so ; it is the strange proposal to build three booths in which the transfigured Lord and His visitants from another world may enjoy separate accommodation and shelter from the night air, since it was good to be there.<sup>1</sup> In answer to this bewildered proposal, which sets the three upon a level, the voice from heaven bids them continue to hear Jesus, as they have done for years, and He alone is left with them (Mark ix. 5).

But this, though an extreme example, is not at all a solitary one. It is not enough to await Jesus in the ship ; he desires to meet Him half-way, upon the water ; he must remonstrate if Christ's forebodings appear too gloomy ; he wants to know, "Why cannot I follow Thee now ?" he must needs smite unbidden ; and while awaiting new revelations he will go a-fishing (Matt. xiv. 28 ; Mark viii. 32 ; John xiii. 37, xviii. 10, xxi. 3).

There is always a similar plunge, one might say, into the water, into unweighed words, into conflict, and into the stronghold of his foes. And in every case he is quite willing to act alone. This is the peculiarity which Jesus

<sup>1</sup> In several manuscripts Peter proposes that he should himself build all three tabernacles.

indicated, with a wonderfully accurate and delicate touch, in the words, When thou wast young, thou didst go, with loins girt, in the ways of thine own will (John xxi. 18).

Such quick feelings and impulsive ardour are the natural companions of a quality, dangerous enough, but absolutely necessary for his high calling, the great readiness of speech, of which several examples have been already quoted. His impulsive utterances did often outrun his judgment and become blameworthy, but they were almost always high-toned and lovable.

It is worth notice, that while he is so commonly the speaker for the group, we do not once read of his being so for evil. The rebuke of those who sought to have their children blessed, and of one who cast out devils without following the apostles, the imputing of sin to "this man or his parents," the impatience excited by the clamour of the woman of Canaan, the intrigue for the right-hand and left-hand places in the kingdom, the proposal to call down fire on the Samaritans, and the complaint of the waste of ointment, in no gospel is one of these ascribed to Peter (Mark x. 13; Luke ix. 49; John ix. 2; Matt. xv. 23; Mark x. 37; Luke ix. 54; Matt. xxvi. 8).

And if we reckon up the various occasions of his stumbling, none of them will be traced to meanness or self-indulgence at the root. If he left the ship, it was to go to Jesus; if he dared to rebuke the Lord, it was because the prospect of His suffering shocked him; he would vouch for the payment by his Master of any claim which he deemed just; if his estimate of the duty of forgiveness fell short of the New Testament standard, it excelled that of his nation; he would not suffer his Lord to perform for him a menial office, but when he discerned its deeper meaning, he asked too much, forgetting that he was "bathed" already; he could not believe that any form of peril would shake his

fidelity to Christ, for whom he was indeed prepared to fight, whose surrender only he failed to share; if he slept in the garden, it was "for sorrow"; and if in the palace he was finally overcome, it was because, with nerves unstrung, he yet ventured farther than any, except one who had interest in the place (Matt. xiv. 29, xvi. 22, xvii. 24, xviii. 21; John xiii. 8; Mark xiv. 31; Luke xxii. 45; John xviii. 16).

We come nearer to the secret of his greatness when we observe that his sensibilities were not more alive to anything than to spiritual impressions. It was he who "called to mind" that the blighted fig tree was that which the Master cursed (Mark xi. 21). When his nets broke, he felt neither that a great spoil was given to him, nor yet that the marvel of the giving was greater than the gift; all thought of wonder and of gain was lost in the overwhelming sense of his own unworthiness of such a presence: and although it was not for him to shake off the mighty influence which had come into his life, yet he dared not accept it without the confession, the almost protest, "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord."

Thus Job, when he saw God, abhorred himself and repented; and thus Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone." Self-abasement, not presumptuous confidence, restored the patriarch, and gave Isaiah and Peter their commission (Luke v. 8; Job xlii. 6; Isa. vi. 5).

When Jesus asked the Twelve, "Will ye also go away?" it was Peter who answered, acting, perhaps for the first time, as the authorized spokesman of all the company. He did not speak of the marvellous miracle they had witnessed; rather was his heart still vibrating with the great utterance which had offended many, and therefore he said, "Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God." And since men who had learned the message of eternity could not return



to their nets, nor choose but follow some spiritual chief, he asked, "Lord, to whom should we go?" (John vi. 68.)

Again, when Jesus asked, "Who say men that I am?" all were ready to declare how some said with Herod that He was the Baptist, some Elias the forerunner, some (because Jesus had now begun to foretell a new ruin of Jerusalem) the melancholy Jeremiah, and others vaguely one of the old prophets. But when Jesus again asked, "Who say ye that I am?" Peter alone gave the clear and decisive answer; not, as with the qualifying preface used of the guesses of the people, "we say," but confidently, as one might hail his king, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 13-17).

Blessed in that hour was Simon Bar-Jonas, and now Christ declared to him that he was actually Peter; because this truth was not revealed to him by flesh and blood, not even by the lips of Jesus, but by the voice of the Father, heard in the silence of a consecrated heart. Not that he was himself the rock, for against his gratified self-confidence the gates of hell too quickly began to prevail, and the words which he next pronounced fell upon the Saviour's ear as the very utterance of the evil one. But the great confession he had made was the foundation and basis of the Christian faith; and therefore it was given to him to open the gates of the spiritual kingdom, alike to Jews upon the day of Pentecost, and to Gentiles by the baptism of Cornelius.

It is entirely in accordance with all the character we have been examining, that an appealing glance, and the occurrence of a trivial but predicted event should suffice to arrest his fall, and from wild and recreant oaths convert him to the weeping of bitter tears (Luke xxii. 60, 61).

And it is to be observed that, while the Searcher of hearts knew the special danger of censoriousness and uncharity in the hour of one's own pardon, and expressed it in the parable of a debtor, forgiven much, who straightway, be-

ginning to economise, took by the throat his own debtor of a hundred pence, yet He had no fears of this kind for Peter, but looked to him, when restored, to restore the rest, who should also have forsaken their Lord and fled. Such is the only sufficient meaning of the words which warn Peter, calling him for his greater admonition by the old name of his secular life, "Simon, Simon, Satan asked to have you (*all*), that he might sift you as wheat; but I made prayer for thee (*in particular*), that thy faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren" (Luke xxii. 31, 32).

This was his especial function. And yet John was more faithful; he did not deny Christ in the judgment hall, he watched by Him at the cross. But John's nature was pen- sive, retiring, passive, better suited to fathom the mystery of the eternal Word, than to take the helm in a tempest.

This leads us to consider the remarkable relation which exists between the silent disciple, who received the tender charge of Mary, and him whose sinewy hands were fitter to grasp the ponderous keys of the kingdom than to wipe a woman's tears.

It is not very hazardous to infer that Peter and John were linked when Jesus sent forth His apostles two by two.

We have already seen that each sub-division of four apostles is the same in every list of the Twelve; and this represents, almost certainly, a fixed arrangement. In that case we may safely assert that each group contained two of those couples whom our Lord saw fit to join together; for the same reasons, whether of mutual attraction or of character which once yoked them together, would oppose the rupture of the tie. It follows that the colleague of Peter was either Andrew or else James or John. But his brother Andrew seems most unlikely, because there would be less of stimulus in the presence of a member of his own family, and less reinforcement for his weakness in one whose

character, as will be shown hereafter, is curiously similar to his own, though less vigorously developed. What is desirable in such a case is the alliance of natures, not indeed antagonistic, but supplementary, so that, as Lord Tennyson sings of a still closer tie, each may subserve defect in each. It was thus with the friendship which that great poet has immortalized ; and he has written :

“ ‘ More than my brothers are to me ’—  
 Let this not vex thee, noble heart!  
 I know thee of what force thou art  
 To hold the costliest love in fee.

But thou and I are one in kind,  
 As moulded like in nature's mint;  
 And hill and wood and field did print  
 The same sweet forms on either mind.

And so my wealth resembles thine,  
 But he was rich when I was poor,  
 And he supplied my want the more  
 As his unlikeness fitted mine.”

It will appear in a future paper that the wealth of Andrew too much resembled Peter's own to be chosen to supply his want.

With James Peter is never found co-operating in any special effort, although both are included with John in the inner circle, the elect of the election among the Twelve. But Peter and John were as admirably adapted to help each other as the two great heroes of the Reformation, whom they so much resembled in other ways, Luther and Melanchthon.

It will therefore be a striking coincidence, and a fine example of the minute harmonies which close examination reveals throughout all the narratives, if these *à priori* considerations of probability coincide with a number of recorded facts.

Now Peter and John were sent together to find the man bearing a pitcher of water; Peter beckoned to John to ask who was the traitor; it was John who brought Peter into the palace of the high priest; Mary Magdalene, when sent to "tell Peter," found him and John together, and they ran both to the sepulchre; it was to Peter in the fishing boat that John whispered his recognition of the mysterious stranger on the shore; and Peter asked concerning John, "What shall this man do?" together they went to the temple when the lame man at the Beautiful Gate received their wondrous alms; they subsequently stood forward together when Peter made his bold defence; and they two were sent together by the apostles at Jerusalem to confirm the disciples at Samaria<sup>1</sup> (Luke xxii. 8; John xiii. 24, xviii. 16, xx. 2, xxi. 7, 21; Acts iii. 1, iv. 13, 19; viii. 14).

Nothing can be more consistent than all the incidents and traits which we have now compared. A glance at the references will show that they are drawn impartially from all four gospels and from the Acts of the Apostles. They are not a few convenient facts selected from a great many, for there is scarcely an incident recorded of him, and certainly not one characteristic or important incident, which has not found its place in the accumulative demonstration.

The most homely events and the most astounding miracles are equally stamped with this verifying impress—the manner of Simon Bar-Jonas, as unmistakable as the impatient style of Carlyle, or the bold touch of Michael Angelo.

And yet this rich, exuberant, and strongly drawn character is over-mastered at every point by that of Jesus, before Whom he does well to prostrate himself.

<sup>1</sup> It will be observed that this duty is imposed upon him after he has entered upon whatever authority may be supposed to accompany the keys. A modern Romanist is therefore bound to ask whether his bishops are in a position to order a pope upon a journey. The surprise with which he would receive such a commission is the measure of his usurpation.

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Moreover, we have primitive authority for believing that St. Peter contributed the materials at least for the second gospel, which is full of just such incidents as would delight his vehement spirit. Its very keynote is the word "straightway," and everything in it breathes of the energy, penetration, decision, and fire which took the heart of Peter by storm.

But here, as elsewhere, we never once find the Master overstepping those limits of prudence and fine feeling which the disciple transgressed so often. It is indeed on this account, and by reason of the exquisite balance of all great qualities in the Messiah, that so many are surprised when bidden to observe the strength and even intensity of will and action of the

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild."

We do not recognise the burning will, the zeal which "devoured," when we find them mellowed and sweetened by the softer graces, only not predominant when it is a duty to set them aside.

As an admirably proportioned man does not appear so large as another of equal stature, so the powers of Christ are less discerned by reason of their harmony. And therefore it is well that, like St. Margaret's Church beside Westminster Abbey, the impetuous fervour of Peter should serve as a scale by which the imagination can measure the redeeming energies which inspired, rebuked, and converted him, which faltered not when he fled, and having conquered the grave, restored to him his forfeited commission.

The Christian is at least entitled to ask the unbelieving critic: How can the authenticity of this strong and graphic conception be denied? yet how can it be accepted without conceding the miraculous narrative and all the claims of Christ?

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