

The Three Apostles

by

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*“Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John,
and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves.”*

— Mark ix. 2.

No one can doubt that in order to have the key of the whole revelation of God, we must turn to the Life, the Teaching, the Person of Jesus Christ. There alone is contained Himself has told us is no There alone are to be however variously ex- founded. There is the will respecting us, which and apply, is the highest or student of theology can

But without touching there is another, which, closely allied with it, and out of the very structure tures, is not, I trust, unsuited to the present time or place: namely, What was the human medium through which that Divine life, and those Divine



that knowledge which He less than life eternal. found the facts, on which, plained, Christianity is original outline of God’s fully to unfold, explain, task to which any teacher aspire.

on this higher question, though subordinate, is which, arising as it does of the Christian Scrip- tures, is not, I trust, unsuited to the present time or place: namely, What was the human medium through which that Divine life, and those Divine

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truths, were in the first instance communicated to man? Is the intervening atmosphere, as some would tell us, an indistinct haze, in which all particular shapes are wholly lost to us? or can we, through the mist of ages—can we, through the drifting clouds of Jewish or Gentile opinion—can we, through the brightness which surrounds Him who was the express Image of God, discern any distinction of individual form and feature to tell us what were the human influences which first intercepted the rays of that Divine glory—what the human characters which received themselves, or caught for others, the first impression of that Divine countenance? It surely is not presumptuous to say that we can. It was, we may well believe, not without meaning, that as the Twelve were separated from the multitude, so the Three were separated from the Twelve, to be with their Master “apart by themselves,” on the mount and in the garden, in His Glory and in His suffering: “Simon, whom He surnamed the Rock, and James and John, whom He surnamed the Sons of Thunder.”¹ Of these, one, indeed, is presented to our view to be almost immediately withdrawn from it. Of James we know hardly any thing, save his sudden and early removal by the sword of Herod’s executioner. But in his place, whether we ascribe it to chance or design in the providential laws of the world, there arose one, who, though not of the original Twelve, was “yet not behind the very chiefest of the Apostles” in labours, in miracles, or in the closest communion with his risen Lord. To James succeeded Paul, and from that time no less surely than the earliest disciples waited on the lips of the first Three as they descended from the holy mount, may we fix our gaze on the Three of the later period—PETER, PAUL, and JOHN.

It is, indeed, no passing fancy which rises before us in the image of that scene, which, even in its outward form, has been so indelibly impressed upon our minds by the well-known representation of the transfiguration, so familiar to us in one of the highest works of Christian art. To that Divine teaching, which, as I have said before, is truly the essence of revelation, far removed above all earthly influences whatsoever—to that Divine Form “whose face did shine as the sun, and whose raiment was exceeding white as snow, so as no fuller on earth can white them”—we may still, each one for ourselves, recur, without any human interposition, to know the one original object of our Christian faith. But in tracing its gradual descent into that world of sin and misery below, where the disciples are evermore vainly striving to cast out the evil spirit which vexes and destroys the children of men—in investigating its actual historical application to the existing

circumstances of the world,—it is something to remember that these Three, and these alone, exhaust all the influences which were at work in the intermediate conflict of the apostolical age; that these Three, and these alone, intervene between us and Christ.

If the various forms of evil, which throw their shadows over the Gospel history, are marked out by the mere fact of their contact with Jesus the Christ, for our especial warning, it is no less true that in those who were the especial instruments of His purposes we may see the various forms of goodness which God has marked out for our especial imitation. If even in common history a thousand men are truly said to die to make up one hero—if in every part of Scripture it is clear that the prominent characters represent to us vast classes of human thought which without them would have no expression—then most emphatically is this the case with the three great Fathers of the whole Christian world. If, in short, it may be said, without irreverence, that the character and life of our Lord Himself determined once for all the whole character of Christianity for all future ages—then, although in a far lower degree, it may be said that the several forms and stages through which Christianity has passed, have been exemplified to us in the characters of St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John.

Each of the Three has his distinct place in the first formation of the early Church. Peter is the Founder, Paul the Propagator, John the Finisher—Peter the Apostle of the rising dawn, Paul of the noon in its heat and in its clearness, John the sunset—first in the stormy sunset of the Apocalypse, then in the calm brightness of the Gospel and Epistles of his old age. Each is the centre round which the floating elements of thought and action—the scattered writings of the sacred canon—the wild distortions of them in the heretical sects—clustered and crystallized. The whole world of Jewish Christians leaned upon St. Peter, as the whole world of Gentile converts leaned upon St. Paul, and the whole body of mixed believers turned, after the fall of Jerusalem, to the sole surviving Apostle at Ephesus. Each was connected with the sole authentic records of the life of Christ; whatever may be the explanation in detail of the origin of the twin Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Mark, there can be little doubt that it was St. Peter's disciples, who first received the representation which is preserved to us in the Prophet and Lawgiver according to St. Matthew, the human Friend according to St. Mark: whatever may be the account of the compilation of the Gospel and Acts of St. Luke, we need not hesitate to recognise in them St. Paul's view, first, of the Suffering Victim, then of the

Invisible Guide of the universal Church; whatever may have been the immediate objects for the Gospel of St. John, we at once acknowledge that we there have the complete image of the Word made flesh, which the early Church naturally believed could have proceeded from none but the beloved disciple. Each has borne his part in the unfolding of the Divine economy. Peter, the Apostle of courageous and confident hope, Paul of faith, John of love; Peter, of power and action; Paul of thought and wisdom; John of feeling and of goodness; Peter clings to the recollections of the older world, that is passed or passing away: Paul plunges into the conflicts of the present: John, whether as prophet, evangelist, or teacher, fixes his gaze on the invisible and the future: Peter gave to Christianity its first outward historical form; Paul its inward and spiritual freedom; John, that Divine end and object in which form and spirit harmonize.

And what wonder is it, that—as in epochs far less momentous, in characters far less impressive, the germs of future destiny have been discovered,—so here subsequent ages have delighted to recognise in each that peculiar type and form of the Christian faith which was to them most congenial? What wonder that the whole of Christian Europe through those early struggles which can hardly fail to recall to our minds the times of the Jewish covenant, reposed with such unshaken confidence on the name of Peter? that in the gradual rising of a freer spirit, the gradual opening of a wider sphere, theologians and statesmen, nations and individuals, were enkindled with new life by the words of Paul? that in these our latter days, all thoughtful minds, whether in search of evidence from Christian history, of comfort from Christian truth, of instruction from Christian holiness, are turning by a natural instinct to the writings of the last Apostle, who left the historical record in his Gospel of the things which he saw and heard, and taught us that God is Spirit, and that God is Love?

What I have said is not inconsistent with the existence of the other spheres of influence in the apostolical age, which will at once occur to many of us. Not to speak of modes of thought external but still congenial to the first beginning of the Christian society—not to lay stress on the long-cherished veneration for the teaching of John the Baptist—I will name two individuals who might seem at first sight to hold almost divided sway with the three great Apostles, and who certainly are, next to them, the two chief centres of interest; I mean, James the Just, and Apollos. But though they require a distinct mention in any complete analysis of the apostolical age, it is obvious that their sphere was too limited and temporary, and their

position too subordinate, to interfere with the general truth of the absolute and unrivalled supremacy of one or other of the three Apostles. Thus with regard to James, it is indeed impossible to mistake the tone of authority and the independent character which belongs to his Epistle, or the commanding position, which, according to Josephus and Hegesippus, no less than the Acts, he occupied amongst the Jews and Jewish Christians of Palestine. Still, though from this point of view he was regarded and may by us be regarded in the position in which he is on one occasion placed by St. Paul as the very chiefest pillar² of the early Church, yet from a higher and more general point of view, he is absorbed in the similar but wider sphere of Peter, the one great Apostle of the Circumcision. And though Apollos³ was so “eloquent” in Alexandrian wisdom, and “so mighty in the Jewish Scriptures” that he was placed by the Corinthian factions on a level even with Paul and Cephas, and though modern criticism has found it difficult to refuse him at least a share in that great Epistle, of unknown origin, which forms so remarkable a link between the writings of Paul and John, yet the few hints which we possess of his life and character, amply justify the usual belief which for all practical purposes has merged his career in that of the Apostle of the Gentiles.

Such is the general view which must always have been present more or less to every careful reader of the New Testament, but which has only been brought out in its full distinctness by the increased study and observation of later years. It is indeed the peculiar privilege of an age like ours, that in proportion as it recedes from the events of the past by lapse of time, it is enabled in thought and imagination to reproduce them with a vividness which to previous ages was wholly unknown. If criticism destroys much, it creates more. If it cuts away some grounds from our faith, it re-constructs out of the chasm others incomparably more secure. If the sea of doubt has advanced along one part of our coast, it has proportionably receded from another. If it has been maintained that “infidelity is” in some respects “in a more hopeful position” towards Christianity than heretofore, its ancient strongholds have been absolutely destroyed. If Christians of the fourth century still enjoyed something like a living recollection of the first, it would be easy to prove, that of facts so remarkable as the object and plan of the several Gospels, the chronology of the Epistles, the gift of tongues, and many similar points, even Eusebius and Chrysostom knew far less than we do. If Christians of the fourteenth century reposed with confidence on the genuineness of the so called Apostolical Constitutions, and the elaborate

forgery ascribed to Dionysius the Areopagite, it was still reserved for Christians of the nineteenth century to discern in those remains of the apostolical age which increased inquiry has but doubly confirmed to us, whole scenes, characters, and institutions, which were to our forefathers as if they had never existed at all.

Nor let us shrink from making use of this, God's especial gift to us, from a fear lest by doing we should think less reverently of those whom God has chosen out to communicate His will to men. "I was afraid and hid thy talent in the earth," was the speech of the unfaithful servant. "Stand up, for I also am a man," was the speech of the first Apostle to one who would have worshipped him. Creation is not set aside, because God has allowed us to discover the general laws by which the world was brought into existence; still less is revelation resolved, as some would say, into "a merely human process," because we are able to trace the human or the natural agencies through which it has been conveyed. It has been remarked not less wisely than boldly, that of the five causes assigned by Gibbon for the rapid advance of Christianity, there is not one which need not be gladly admitted by the sincerest believer, if only he understands them rightly. And this remark is obviously of equal force if extended from the later propagation of the faith to its earlier formation. The Patriarchs were not less truly the friends of God, because in their outward lives we see a faithful likeness of the usages of an Arab chief. Moses did not less receive the law from God, because he was a man "mighty in words and deeds, and learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians."⁴ The Judges were not less truly raised up by God, because their name and functions were the counterpart of the magistrates of their Phœnician neighbours. The Kings were not less truly the anointed of the Lord, because their office was actually suggested by the practice "of all the nations round about." The Prophets were not less certainly inspired by God, because the vision of Messiah's kingdom presented itself to them in the earthly images of their age and country. And in like manner the Apostles of Christ were not less the heaven-sent Lawgivers of the Christian world for ever, because they spoke the language, and breathed the atmosphere, and represented the feelings of a time which is past away. "What God hath joined let no man put asunder." Let us contemplate them not merely as lifeless instruments, or empty shadows, but as "men of like passions with ourselves," and we shall not be the less, but the more able to enter into the higher truth, that while Paul planted and Apollos watered, it was God that

gave the increase; that how different soever were their individual gifts, it was the self-same Spirit working in each of them severally as He would.

It will be my endeavour then from time to time to lay before you the most striking results at which those have arrived who have most studied the subject; to describe in succession the historical position of each of the three Apostles, to inquire what were the natural faculties of feelings with which each was endowed, what the various lines of thinking and of acting which converged in each, what the peculiar work to which each was called in the Church of God. But before I descend into details it may be well to insist on some practical advantages which flow from a consideration of the subject not in its parts but as a whole.

I. Viewing the Apostles in their purely human, historical, individual characters, it is on the lowest ground most valuable as a matter of Christian evidence. A distinct image of any one part of the rise of the Christian religion, however insignificant that part may be in itself, does much to confirm the strictly historical character of the whole narrative; even though it be no more than the details of a shipwreck on the Mediterranean sea, it is something to feel certain that here at least is a plain matter of fact which cannot be disputed, here at least we have a firm footing where we may pause for a moment to overlook the surrounding country. Much more if this same impression can be extended to the lives of those who were, according to all accounts, the chief instruments in the work. Once let us fix in our minds, by whatever means, the fact that Peter, Paul, and John, exercised as real an influence over the Roman empire in the age of Nero and of Trajan, as Socrates over the age of Pericles, and Aristotle over the age of Alexander, and it will then be hard, even to the extreme of difficulty, to find a reason for abandoning our faith in Christ crucified and Christ risen.

It is not, God be thanked, the whole evidence for the Divine origin of our Faith, it is at most but half of it. If, as it has been well said,⁵ the two great proofs which contain all that we need, are "Christianity and Christendom,"—the intrinsic excellence of the truth itself, and the wonderful effects which that truth has produced,—it is obvious that, whilst the second only of these is exemplified in the lives of the Apostles, the first and greatest is to be sought in no lower region than in the life and teaching of Christ Himself. If it be difficult by any mere human explanation to account for the characters of those by whom Christianity was first preached, it is still more difficult to account by any ordinary circumstances for all that relates to Him whom

they preached. But short of this, whatever evidence we can hope to have from the sudden change in the whole course of the civilized world, from the complete transformation of human characters, from the necessity of supposing an adequate cause, and an adequate object, for the display of energies almost if not altogether unparalleled—all this is brought before us in its most palpable form in proportion as we can conceive to ourselves the historical existence of the Apostles.

II. Again, when we reflect how all of the Three, though absent from us in the body, are present in their Epistles, constantly read in our churches, constantly before us in our Bibles, we surely should understand them better in proportion as we realized to ourselves not merely the sense of each particular passage, but something of the central idea, something of the peculiar characteristics, something of the living image of the Galilean fishermen, and the Pharisee of Tarsus, and the aged Apostle of Ephesus. We should feel the contrast between the colour which even their minds received from the influences of their age and country, and the absolute elevation about them all of Him who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; between the distinctness of individual character in each of them, and the total absence of any merely human peculiarities in the life and character of Him, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. We should, in proportion as we realized those spheres of thought of which each of them was a centre, learn to perceive what is universal and eternal in their writings, and what is local and temporary—to distinguish the principles of Christian truth and duty which were then laid down once and for ever, from the particular modes of their application, which vary with every age and country, the particular forms and institutions which for the most part never have been reproduced in any subsequent time, and probably never can be.

III. Once more, the compatibility of great varieties in forms, characters and views, with the closest unity of spirit, is a topic which has been of late times much insisted on, and which all history, no less than our own daily experience, concurs in teaching us. But there is nothing, whether in the revelations of God, or the wisdom of man, which brings this lesson home to us with such irresistible force, as the simple fact, thoroughly understood, that the most perfect of all truth was imparted to the world not in one uniform code, at one single moment of time, but by a gradual process lasting through more than half a century, and by the agency of men in natural character and disposition the most opposite that it is possible for the human mind to conceive. It might have pleased the Most High to have

illuminated the understandings of all His Apostles in an equal degree by one single lightning flash on the day of Pentecost. It might have been so ordered, that every other voice should have been hushed, and that one Gospel and one Epistle alone should have spoken to us from the general silence.—It is by thus conceiving what might have been, that we can best understand what has been. Not to dwell now on the successive stages in the progress of each, which will best appear hereafter, let us bring once for all before our minds the contrast which divides one from the other. It is in their writings, of course, that this contrast is most vividly seen. In the case of St. Peter, indeed, the contrast is rather in action than in word—between his Epistles and those of St. Paul, there is, from distinct reasons which will best be explained in another connexion, a greater likeness than could naturally have been anticipated between the two Apostles, who in their actual lives stood at the two opposite poles of the apostolical age, whom the conflicting factions of the time endeavoured to represent as rival teachers, of whom “one withstood the other to the face because he was to be blamed.” But if we bear in mind this complete antithesis between their practical spheres,—and if we further remember that it is the Epistle of St. James which expresses most strongly in writing the peculiar views of what may without offence be termed the school of St. Peter,—then it is not too much to say that never in any age of the world have there been employed in the same time and country, and for one common cause, styles of thought and language so radically distinct as those which appear in the works of these three Apostles: that in no comparison of cotemporary works, whether in ancient and in modern literature, is it so impossible to mistake the style of one author for that of another, as it would be to confound the severe and prophet-like warnings of St. James with the impassioned appeals and complicated arguments of St. Paul, or either of them with the simple aphorisms and intuitive perceptions of St. John. Whatever, in short, is the difference between action and thought, between a mind building itself up on the past, and a mind embracing and communicating to others a flood of new and startling ideas, is the difference between St. Peter and St. James on the one hand, and St. Paul on the other; whatever is the difference between those two great philosophers, who may emphatically be said to have divided between them the two great schools of human thought and speculation—such, if we may without irreverence adopt an analogy long since suggested by one of our own theologians;⁶ such, in kind, and in its leading features, is the difference between St. Paul and St. John.

Such is the fact in its general outline, and now what should be our inference from it? I might point out, were this a congregation which needed to be told, or had not others already explained it in part from this place, how triumphant a testimony is borne to the divinity of Gospel truth by the distinct and independent characters of “the Gospel witnesses.”⁷⁷ I might dwell on the impression which is left upon us not only of the truth and the Divine origin, but of the inexhaustible greatness of Christianity, when we see “the many mansions” of our Father’s house thus opening in succession before us; when we reflect on the vast amount of wisdom and holiness which might be gathered, and which has been gathered from the representation of Christianity by each of the Three singly; and yet beyond them all, the impression to be produced by the harmony and comparison of all the Three together. But perhaps the most practical and obvious result is that to which I alluded before—the solemn, I might almost say the awful, sanction, thus given, to the union of the most various tempers, thoughts and views, within the pale of our Christian sympathy. When we look steadily at this fact, not accidentally connected with the Sacred Canon, but engrained into its very inmost substance—not one out of a hundred insignificant events of an ordinary age, but standing in the very foremost ground of the most critical epoch in the history of the human race—it seems impossible to explain away its importance, as though it belonged to a generation of men with whom we have no concern. However difficult it may be in many cases to pass from the circumstances of the apostolical age to those of our own, in this case at least there is no such insurmountable difference between them, as need deprive us of the lesson which is read to us by this divergence of the Apostles from each other. We must remember that, if we look upon their diversities of style, and thought, and action, as trivial, their cotemporaries, as will appear more clearly afterwards, often looked upon them as matters of life and death—that if our difficulties are aggravated by the co-existence of all manner of schools and opinions, which in former ages existed separately, this was more especially the case in the first century than in any other age except our own—that if long familiarity has habituated us to the amalgamation of their several writings and views, there was a time when the Churches of St. James knew nothing of the Churches of St. Paul—that nearly a whole generation passed away before either of them received the Gospel and Epistles of St. John—that the very highest truths concerning God and man are expressed by each of the Three in terms not merely dissimilar, but absolutely opposed, to the other. It will

be thought for a moment that these apparent differences are real contradictions: nor again, that the mere co-existence of different views in itself constitutes real unity. It is certainly not enough to dwell of the divergence of the apostolical writings, unless we dwell also on the still higher and essential harmony to which this divergence leads—it is not enough to be tolerant of the various forms of goodness and truth, unless we strive to unite them in ourselves, as they are combined for our instruction in the volume of the New Testament—it is not enough that our sympathies should be wide, unless they be deep and strong—not enough to know the breadth and length of Christianity, unless we also know its height and depth; whilst in one sense it is most true that different ages, nations, and individuals may range themselves under one or other of the three Apostles, there is yet a higher sense in which no less truly every age, nation and individual must belong to all the three alike;—whilst in one sense Paul, and Apollos, and Cephas, and John are all distinct, in a higher sense they are all one, “for we are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.”⁸

Still, whether we look at their differences or their unity, the practical lesson for us is the same. If there be any who are perplexed by the divisions of opinion which exist amongst us, it surely must be a consoling thought that no greater burden is laid upon us than was laid upon the Apostles and their followers. If there be any to whom the many noble qualities which emerge on all sides out of the midst of these divisions inspire the longing and suggest the thought of a happier and a better union than we have known for many centuries, it is surely a hopeful reflection that some such union was foreshadowed to us in the spring time of the Christian society. If there be a communion amongst us, which, whether by the overruling providence of God, or the jarring passions of men, or the national character of our countrymen, has had the power of uniting within its pale more dissimilar elements than any other communion in the world—if its institutions and its forms of worship be such as of necessity to afford a refuge to those who shrink from rushing into either of the two extremes between which Christendom is at present divided—if it thereby holds out a means of Christian unity which we cannot lose without at the same time violating its fundamental principles—then such a communion, whatever may be its general character, and however far unlike in this or other respects it may be to the Church of the fifth or of the fifteenth century, is at least in this respect not wholly unlike to the Church of the apostolical age.

IV. I have hitherto spoken of the Apostles as men—of those points which they have not in distinction from, but in common with, the men of other times and of ordinary circumstances. We must now turn to them as Apostles—to that more solemn and sacred character with which our natural feeling almost instinctively invests them—and this the more lest the very vividness of the historical image which rises before us should tempt us to neglect the general effect of the whole scene, in overcharging the picture of each individual figure. I have spoken of them, and shall have occasion again to speak of them, in the phraseology which we employ to describe the great men of common history, as swayed by the influences, representing the feelings, and directing the revolutions of their age—and I have done so, and shall continue to do so, because I know no other language which can adequately express the transcendent interest, the heroic grandeur of all that belongs to that more than second birthday of the world's history. But if one word which I have uttered, or may utter, calls up an image of merely intellectual greatness, or throws into the shade for one moment the Divine power, without which the highest Apostle felt himself to be as nothing, I would once for all remind you that such an expression is not more certainly inconsistent with our common religious feeling, than it is with the whole idea of the Apostles' characters—that it is no mere transient impulse of devotion, but the strictest truth of fact, which calls upon us to join in that great thanksgiving which was, if I may so say, the natural expression of Him who saw from the first to last the full consequences of the new element which in them was first and most fully exemplified:—"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."⁹ It was not only that the religion which the Apostles preached was new, but there their very appearance was also new in itself—not only that they were "full welling fountainheads of change"—but that when we have tracked these changes up to their source, we find ourselves on a level hitherto wholly unknown to us, on a mountain-ridge which not only overtops, but countersects, all those other ranges which determine the configuration of the moral surface of the world. It was not by intellectual power, like the philosophers of Greece, nor by arms and statesmanship, like the conquerors of Rome, nor by the influence of a sacerdotal order like the priestly castes of India or of Egypt, nor even by the patriotic zeal and unshaken endurance of their own Jewish ancestors, that the supremacy of the Apostles was established. It was by the transforming energy of simple goodness, devoted, with a

child-like faith, through a whole life to the service of God and man. Paul indeed, in one sense, stands apart from the others; but even in him the change effected by his conversion was so powerful, the intellectual was so completely merged in the moral greatness of his character, that he is only an apparent exception. And of the other two, I will only say that one main cause of our difficulty in entering into their writings, lies in the difficulty of realizing to ourselves the style and language of men suddenly called from the lowest and most uneducated stations to speak on the loftiest subjects which can exercise the mind of man. They stand the first and greatest in that long-protracted warfare, in which the weak things of the world have confounded the things that were mighty—in which the palaces of Nero gave way before the unlettered slaves who herded in the Roman catacombs—in which the kinds and philosophers of Europe have been instructed by the peasant from the plough, the workshop, and the mine.

And again, great beyond expression as was the revolution in which the Apostles bore their part, and great as that part was, there is still a truth in the common feeling which teaches us to look upon them as instruments, rather than as actors,—as unconsciously impelled, rather than as consciously directing its course. They enkindle others because there is burning within themselves a fire which will not suffer them to rest: “we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard”; “necessity is laid upon me, yea woe is me if I preach not the Gospel”; however high they rise, there is something higher still behind, to which their words, their miracles, their lives, point with a constant witness. If they were not something besides the heroes and great men of other ages, great men and heroes they were not; exalt their human influence to the utmost, and still—if there was not a mightier than any human agency at work, a greater than any human interest at stake—we have not solved the difficulty of their existence, their lives no less than their writings will become unmeaning and impotent.

It is this which brings us to the great question,—What was the one common, the one peculiar element which raised Peter, Paul, and John, so high above all others—which raised the Twelve above the rest, and the Three above the Twelve—which made them in short not merely teachers, philosophers, philanthropists, missionaries, prophets—but Apostles? What was the faculty, or feeling, or fact, on which their gifts, their miracles, their writings, their inspiration, were based?—It was this, that they had seen, and known, and felt, not merely by the outward senses, but through the working of the Spirit of God in their inmost spirits, the life and death

and rising again of Jesus Christ. What the vision of the Lord of Hosts with the seraphim in the Temple had been to Isaiah,—what the vision of the whirlwind, and the chariot, and the cherubim, had been to Ezekiel on the banks of the river Chebar;—that, the sight, the impression, the intercourse of our Lord had been to the Apostles. Deny this, and their whole history is one inexplicable riddle. Grant this, and almost every difficulty is fully accounted for. “He shall receive of Mine, and shall shew it unto you,”¹⁰ was our Lord’s own description of the promised Comforter. “To have been a witness of the resurrection,”¹¹ is the one test of Apostleship so often insisted upon by St. Peter. “Have I not seen the Lord Jesus?”¹² is the answer of St. Paul to those who would not have questioned his authority. “That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, which our hands have handled,—that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you,”¹³ is St. John’s commendation to the readers of his Gospel and Epistle. That Divine Presence was felt to be ever with them; that eye of love ever upon them; that voice of wisdom ever sounding in their ears; the recollections of that Divine Teacher repelled, as by instinct, shade after shade of superstition and harshness and untruth; the communion with that Divine Friend drew their hearts heavenward, where He sate at the right hand of God: they, beyond all others, “*reflecting* as in a glass the glory of their Lord, were changed into His likeness from glory to glory.”¹⁴

V. And now we can enter at once on that in which their characters both as men and as Apostles converge, the eternal lesson of their example. “Be ye followers of me even as I am of Christ Jesus,” are words which, if what I have said be true, should ever rise to our minds when the life of an Apostle is brought before us. So said not the older prophets; they were signs, oracles, preachers, but not of necessity examples. It was the characteristic privilege of the Apostles that their lives, like that of their Divine Master, though in lower degree, cannot be known and felt without being imitated. Prophets, psalmists, evangelists, miracles, preachers, rulers, all these may pass away from the Christian Church, but Apostles never. The first burst of early devotion, the first impression of the Word made flesh, are indeed gone. In that the Apostles must stand alone: in that no later age can claim the slightest share. But the spirit of their example—that new wonder which the world saw for the first time in their lives—and which alone is the imperishable part of an Apostle’s office—the devotion of their whole energies for the love of Christ, to the moral and spiritual good of man—this, the especial creation of Christianity, has lasted with it; this Divine succession has endured—

consecrated not by man, or through man, but by God Himself—not expiring, as some have fondly deemed, with the primitive Church, nor with the saints of the Middle Ages, nor with the Puritans of the seventeenth century—but to be revived in every place and in every time, and in every station of life, so long as we believe in the continuance of God’s grace, and the freedom of man’s will.

Therefore it is no abrupt transition, if from a subject in itself so great and wide, our thought should turn to our own sphere of duties here, to you, my younger hearers, for whose sake especially I am called to this place. Even were the atmosphere of your present lives ten times more uncongenial than it is to the exercise of the highest moral and religious gifts, still it cannot be useless for you to feel what they are in others: it cannot be indifferent whether you disregard or treasure up, whether you admire, or whether you treat with no concern, the examples of apostolical goodness, which you may have heard of, or have seen; whether amongst the dead or the living; whether in the first or the nineteenth century. It is most important, whether in your lives here, or in looking forward to your future professions, that you should be made to feel that there have been, and are, and always will be, strains of a higher mood to be heard, flashes of a purer light to be seen, than the sights and sounds with which you are most familiar—that there have been, and are, and always will be men, who think more of others than of themselves, more of who is above them, than of what is around them—whose lives are a constant witness that you are not placed in this world solely for your own enjoyment—that you have other interests to consult in your schemes, or opinions, or employments, than the interests and pleasures of yourselves or of your friends. It is most important that you should feel that no sight which you can possibly see is so ennobling, so precious, as the sight of exalted goodness—that it is at your own peril if you stifle the serious thoughts which it may for the moment awake in you—or if you find an excuse in some difference of time, or circumstance, or opinion, or even in error and extravagance, for turning aside from the eternal lesson which from the Apostles downwards always has been and will be taught by holiness and self-devotion, wheresoever and in whomsoever it may be found.

All this would be true, even if direct imitation were out of the question. But surely even here, even in the easy and unruffled, in the too often frivolous and selfish tenor of an academical life, there is more room than many of us would suppose for the exercising something of the love, for reaping

something of the fruits of apostolical labours. With some of you there has been a time immediately before the commencement of your course here, when the peculiar responsibility and the peculiar means of usefulness which fell to your lot were so great, that a call to tread in the Apostles' footsteps was not then strange to your ears—that St. Paul's complain of "that which came upon him daily in the care of all the Churches," has actually been felt to be the legitimate expression of the sense of your own anxiety. Such direct means of combating evil, as I here speak of, or as you will all of you have in after life, this place certainly does not afford, and its most obvious duties are of another kind. Still it surely is not the inevitable doom of an institution like this, that all care or thought of others should be paralyzed as soon as you enter its walls; even here, in the necessary impression which your characters make on those around you, there is room to be Apostles of Christ or of Satan. Here, as well as elsewhere, there are recorded, instances, on the one hand, of the most precious gifts shipwrecked or perverted for the want of some such guiding hand, of some such thoughtful sympathy—instances, on the other hand, no less, of the effect which a single example of firmness and purity may have in the formation of character, afterwards destined to become the support and blessing of thousands. Whether we look to the history of the Three Apostles, or to our own daily experience here, we know well that it matters not for this whether you have or have not intellectual gifts: it is not merely by conversing on serious subjects that you promote serious thoughts, nor by seeking directly to obtain influence that you really influence others—it is by being good that you do good: it is by kindness and thoughtfulness for others' feelings, by sufferings or disappointments cheerfully endured, by advantages of intellect or fortune humbly borne, by adherence to fixed principles of duty, by the princely heart of guileless innocence, whose very look is the worst rebuke to vice—that here even more than elsewhere, a whole society may be made to feel that there is something better worth living for than our own daily and hourly self-indulgence—something which, even amidst the turmoil or apathy of our own little world here, speaks of that world whither Christ is gone before us. For our own sakes no doubt, indeed, this is no less important than for the sake of others; still the effect of our own conduct on others is often the surest way of reminding us of what it is on ourselves; and as the recollection of the Apostles' lives, if for no other reason, is valuable to us as evidence to the fact that he once lived and died on earth—so it surely is no exaggeration to say, that the lives of Christians now are the greatest

evidence for or against the fact that He now lives in heaven. “Because He lives, we shall live also.”¹⁵ If amidst the controversies, the thoughtless selfishness, the positive sins or temptations of this place, our excitement is sobered, our carelessness checked, our principles strengthened, by the thought of what He was and is—of what He has done and will do for us—then to others and to ourselves His name receives a witness from us, more humble, but not less real, that it once received from Peter, Paul, and John.

Notes

1. Mark iii. 16, 17.
2. Gal. ii. 9.
3. Acts xviii. 24; 1 Cor. i. 12; iii. 22.
4. Acts vii. 22.
5. Coleridge’s Remains.
6. Coleridge’s Table Talk, p. 89, 95.
7. Newman’s Sermons, vol. ii. Serm. xvii. The Gospel Witnesses.
8. 1 Cor. iii. 22, 23.
9. Matt. xi. 25.
10. John xvi. 14.
11. Acts ii. 22; iii. 15; v. 32; 1 Pet. v. 1.
12. 1 Cor. ix. 1.
13. 1 John i. 1.
14. That this is the true rendering of the passage (2 Cor. iii. 18.) seems certain from the context. “We Christians and Apostles, not as Moses with a veil on his face, but with unveiled faces reflecting the glory of Christ, as Moses reflected the glory of the Lord, are changed into His likeness, and so are constantly commending ourselves to you not by concealment, but by openness; not in proportion as our lives are less known, but in proportion as they are more known.” The word itself is ambiguous.
15. John xix. 19.