



HOW PAUL BECAME AN APOSTLE.

BY REV. HENRY BLEBY.

PAUL'S conversion and call to the Christian ministry and the apostleship is one of the most remarkable events in human history, showing that God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts. There was not, to all human observation, on the morning of that day, the evening of which found him at the feet of Jesus, a man upon

2 HOW PAUL BECAME AN APOSTLE.

earth more unlikely to become a disciple of Christ than Saul of Tarsus. He was journeying on his way to Damascus, to execute a commission of persecution and blood, filled with bitter, fiery zeal against Christianity and its professors, and breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord—like the tiger, whose taste of blood has only whetted his appetite for gore—and nothing could be farther from his thoughts than to become a believer in the crucified malefactor, and take his place among the despised followers of Christ. But there had been a vacancy made in the apostleship, and it remained yet to be filled. An agent was wanted of God for a special purpose, and of peculiar gifts to fill a wider sphere of usefulness than the rest of the apostles: and here is the man. In this enemy of the Church—this fierce and unscrupulous persecutor of the saints—is the very individual that God requires; one in whom he sees, though as yet undeveloped, the noble faculties and powers which fit him for the divine purposes, and which are destined

to win for him, through the grace of God, a loftiest place among the great and good and noble and honored of the human race. "Had the wisdom of the Church been consulted," says Richard Watson, "it would doubtless have fixed upon some eminent disciple already known and approved," which was indeed what had been actually done. "But the wisdom of God determines very differently. Divine grace marches into the camp of the enemy, and seizes the head and captain of the persecutors and converts him into an apostle. From a flame of unhallowed fire, the Saviour raises up a soul distinguished by meekness and humble love. He makes the dark prejudices of Pharisaism give place to the most perfect knowledge of the Gospel, and consecrates the feet which had been 'swift to shed blood' to bear the Gospel through the vast extent of the Roman empire."

But here an important question arises: Did Paul make the thirteenth apostle, or was the living Head of the Church here exercising his divine prerogative in filling up the number

4 HOW PAUL BECAME AN APOSTLE.

of the twelve, after a vacancy had been created by the apostasy and suicide of one of the original incumbents? We never read in the Scriptures of *thirteen* apostles. "The *twelve*" are frequently and emphatically spoken of, but there is no reference anywhere in the Scripture to more than that number in the apostolate. In the Book of Revelation, written, it is well known, long after Paul and the other apostles had been filling the world with their doctrine, and while John was an exile in Patmos, there are very significant allusions to the *twelve* apostles. In chapter xii, verse 1, the Christian Church is represented under the figure of "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars"—*twelve, not thirteen stars*. Then, again, in that magnificent description of the Church of the redeemed in chapter xxi, she is described as "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal; and had a wall

great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them *the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*" Rev. xxi, 10-14. The foundations are twelve, and the names of the apostles of the Lamb are only *twelve*, not *thirteen*. Do not these two passages indicate that our Lord never designed to augment his apostles beyond this number, and that in truth there never were more than twelve?

That Paul was truly an apostle, and "not behind the very chiefest of the apostles," cannot be disputed. In one of his epistles to the Corinthians he asserts and vindicates his apostleship in language equally clear and authoritative—clearly in opposition to some who had presumed to call it in question. "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my

6 HOW PAUL BECAME AN APOSTLE.

work in the Lord? If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." 1 Cor. ix, 1, 2. To the Galatians he writes: "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them *which were apostles before me*; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." Gal. i, 15-19. And further he says: "He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles." Gal. ii, 8. "In nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." 2 Cor. xii, 11. With the New Testament in our hands, it is impossible to doubt that Paul was an apostle of the Lord Jesus.

The word *apostle* originally signified a person delegated or sent, a messenger; and it is given to several sorts of messengers, or delegates, in the New Testament. The term is applied to the twelve chosen and sent by our Lord, in the way of eminence and distinction. There were *apostles* or *messengers* of the Churches, but "*the twelve*" were the apostles of the Lord Jesus, standing alone, filling an office, and sustaining honor peculiar to themselves—the *sent*—the *delegates*—the *messengers* of the Lord Jesus Christ; and there is no passage in the New Testament to indicate that ever he designed there should be more in this select and peculiar band than the number originally chosen by himself.

Paul, as an apostle, must then have been the true successor of Judas the apostate, chosen by Christ himself; not in addition to, but to the exclusion of, Matthias, who was not appointed to the apostleship by other than human authority, and whose election was quietly ignored and set aside by Him whose high and exclusive prerogative it was to delegate his

S HOW PAUL BECAME AN APOSTLE.

own apostles. The Scripture account of the choosing of Matthias bears out this view.

The election of Matthias took place in the interval between Christ's ascension and the day of Pentecost, before the Holy Ghost was bestowed in his plenary influence to guide the apostles into all truth, and preserve them from all error. We are not, therefore, required to believe that these men were as yet incapable of falling into mistake or acting without authority. There was among them the same Peter, who had but recently been restored from the grievous fall he had experienced in denying his Lord with oaths and curses; and the same Thomas, whose obstinate unbelief had met with such a severe rebuke from his Lord; and they were all the very same men who, not long before, had forsaken him in his extremity, and fled. As yet the baptism of the Holy Ghost, which was in all future time to preserve them from grievous wrong, had not been given; and it was neither impossible nor unlikely that they should fall into error. It was Peter, always forward and impulsive, who

took the initiative in this business, and proposed to the other disciples to proceed to the election of a successor to the traitor Judas. He did not profess to be acting by Divine direction, but simply on his own views of the propriety and necessity of the case. It nowhere appears in the narrative that our Lord had left any instructions concerning this matter, or that he had given any power or authority to the disciples to elect a successor to the apostleship of Judas. From beginning to end it seems to have been unauthorized.

As there is nothing in the New Testament to show that this act was authorized, so there is no passage in the New Testament to indicate that it was approved and confirmed by the great Head of the Church. In fact, we hear no more of Matthias in the Scriptures after this; his name never occurs again. The narrative of his election by the disciples is a bare, bald statement of what had been done, without a word to indicate Divine approval—just as the narrative of the deception practiced by Jacob upon his blind and aged parent is

given—and it was probably recorded only to afford opportunity of vindicating the prerogative of Christ to choose and send forth his own apostles, by showing how he himself annulled it and set it aside.

Some months elapse after Matthias had been elected, and then this unauthorized act of the disciples is practically disallowed, by the conversion of Paul, and his call to the apostleship by the voice of our Lord Jesus Christ himself; and this extraordinary man takes his place in the apostolate as the special, but not the sole, apostle to the Gentiles, inferior to none in authority, as he was inferior to none in all the high and important qualifications for the office he was delegated to fill.

There is something very significant and expressive in the phraseology in which Paul commences his Epistle to the Galatians. “Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man;” not a messenger or delegate of men, not representing any human authority; neither receiving his commission from man, but directly and immediately from “Jesus Christ and God the

Father." Is there not a quiet allusion here to the election of Matthias by Peter and the other disciples? Matthias was a man-made apostle, and therefore delegated by no competent authority. He was an apostle "*of men,*" and "*by man,*" chosen by, and representing, only a human authority; while Paul was made an apostle by the Lord himself. So in the preface to nearly the whole of his Epistles, Paul asserts and vindicates the Divine origin and authority of his own apostleship.

All this was not without design. Paul was not a man to beat the air, or fight with shadows. He had too many real, substantial cavilers and opposers to contend with, to leave him either time or inclination for any thing of the kind. Had there been no man-made apostle, there would have existed no cause for the use of such language. Paul is evidently maintaining the validity of his own apostleship, in opposition to that of some one which rested upon no basis of Divine authority; and such was the case with Matthias. While all the other apostles—the true apostles of

Christ, including Paul—are clearly shown to have been chosen and appointed by Christ himself, no such claim is made on behalf of Matthias; but his election is shown to have been made, without any plea or pretext of a Divine warrant, at the instigation of Peter.

Both before Christ was crucified, and after he had ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on high, in the symbolical descriptions which are given of the Gospel Church, the *twelve* apostles are always spoken of—never more. The rational conclusion therefore is that Paul was the true successor of Judas, appointed by the highest possible authority, and that the election of Matthias, being disapproved by him whose sole prerogative it was to invest men with apostolic office and honor, was rendered by Paul's appointment entirely null and void.

PHILLIPS & HUNT, 805 Broadway, New York.
TRACT DEPARTMENT.