

THE
CATHOLIC PRESBYTERIAN.

No. VII.—JULY, 1879.

SIMON PETER: THE MAN AND HIS WORK.

A STUDY.

SIMON PETER stands at this hour in a very peculiar position, as between two registers of public opinion. On the one side cavillers have found fault with his low origin, his impulsive disposition, his rough manners, and especially his great sin of denying his Lord. On the other side, tradition-makers have exalted him to the headship of a hierarchical system, and have so surrounded his biography with tales of foolish fancy, that the real man is lost. A fair question is before us—Is the world willing to accept a true picture of the Apostle of the Circumcision? The glamour of what is called high-art, as well as the superstition of high-churchism, conceals his figure. Yet there never lived an honester, plainer, or more thoroughly genuine man. 'It is unfair that all the useful force of his human record should be surrendered just because a dressing-block is needed in a system, itself created out of a perversion. Even Milton, in his "Lycidas," talks about—

"The pilot of the Galilean lake;
Two massy keys he bore, of metals twain
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain);
He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake."

With the triple crown on his head, and the great keys in his hand, the imagination grows bewildered in trying to conceive of a "pilot" in guise of a priest. Such a man is no more a fisher of men than a fisher of fish. He is but a kind of vague unreality.

Simply told, the narrative of Simon's life is one of the most romantic in this world's history. He was the only man ever known to cast a hook in deep water for a coin to pay his taxes with. He was the only man we read of, whose feet trod on waves, finding, until his faith failed, a foothold underneath them like rock. He came forth of a sudden from

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the obscurity of a recordless existence into a front rank as a preacher of the new gospel ; yet his greatest lesson of doctrine was received from a sheet full of living creatures, clean and unclean, dropped down out of heaven. He was led out of prison by an angel, who bewildered him as he delivered him ; and when he stood at the door of a familiar prayer meeting, the friends on their knees declared he was his own ghost.

There was never anything whatsoever about Simon Peter, to be set down as tame or commonplace. Had he any father to be proud of? Yes ; but all we know of Jonas is that Simon was his son. What was his mother's descent ? Nobody can tell ; it was left to after-years for visionary tradition to give her the name of Johanna. Had he a wife ? One evangelist says he had a mother-in-law cured of a fever by miracle ; and an apostle adds that he " led about " a sister. Had he daughters ? Artists explain some singular pictures by repeating the romance of the palsied Petronilla. Had he any other children ? Many scholars still insist that Mark, the evangelist, was his offspring, and had the right to be called literally " Marcus, my son."

Then again, when we leave the literature of legend, we enter the weird realm of architecture ; and we find the walls everywhere covered with stucco and with gold ; limned with frescoes and crusted with mosaics ; forth from which the rugged face of this key-bearing ecclesiastic looks down upon the generations passing beneath.

In some cathedrals, his baptism is pictured ; in others, that strange meeting with Jesus by the river. In stone, he is kneeling as he was when near the olives in Gethsemane ; in bronze, he is reaching out his finger like a modern pope ; on canvas, he is discovered hiding his face from the ineffable radiance, while Jesus Christ is on the mountain transfigured with Moses and Elias. At one time, this Galilean fisherman meets us at the first communion table ; and then he is singing the hymn before they pass out. At another time, the same figure meets us in the presence of the maid-servants ; and now he is swearing to his terrible denial. Then we notice him outside the gate of a palace, and he is weeping bitterly over his folly in the light of the passover moon ; and before we leave the histories of that period of sorrow, we meet him on the shore of Gennesareth, beside another fire of coals, where Immanuel is putting the question which has come down the ages to each one of us, " Lovest thou Me ? " At the last, in solemn shadows of life's evening he appears alone, on the cross, head downwards, crucified with his feet in the air. " Happy man," says fanciful Chrysostome, " to be set in the readiest posture of travel from earth into heaven ! "

Thus constantly we recognise that face and form, till we begin to know him from all the myriad saints and martyrs. He really becomes so identified with Gothic arches and clerestory windows in forests of stone, that almost in an elm-grove men catch themselves looking upwards for a possible glimpse of his head among the lines of crossing branches, or the shimmer of sunshine in the leaves.

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Still, it is most likely that the common people read the history of Simon Peter in the gospels rather for its great human features and display of new life in Jesus Christ. He is thoroughly a man. For good or for ill he is Simon, son of Jonas, from beginning to end. Christ rebukes him, and Paul censures him. Yet, in personal characteristics, Peter continues unaltered and unalterable. He did fall terribly many times; but we feel that he rose again in such a radical form of penitence and contrition that he deserves instantly to have one more chance; and we hurry to him with a return of regard. Such a man's battles are our battles. The human mistakes he made are those that we need to be warned against.

There is no one of all this disciple's failings that is away from our reach; our exposures are perilously like his. So a quick sort of sympathy springs up between us. Our sensibilities, in certain moods of self-searching, actually welcome the guidance of his experience. We are not offended by the verses of that hymn, which makes each of us enter a like confession, whenever we sing it:—

“Jesus, let Thy pitying eye call back a wandering sheep;
False to Thee, like Peter, I would fain like Peter weep!
Let me be by grace restored; on me be all long-suffering shown;
Turn, and look upon me, Lord! and break my heart of stone.”

Such a life must be worth studying, with a painstaking and detailed canvass of all its particulars. But the whole force of our instruction from it will turn upon the power we have to transfer a series of conflicts and triumphs to our own experience. We must identify him with ourselves; we must, therefore, constrain our imaginations to look upon him as an every-day man. Then, when we realise the mighty meaning of his mission, we shall understand him.

It is no purpose of the writer to deny that Simon Peter received a sort of headship among the apostles; there was a specific work to which Jesus called him in the establishment of the visible Church. By nature he was a leader of his kind. That age he lived in was one of exciting outlook, and eager expectancy. His race is historic for its incarnate enthusiasm and heroic adventure. Rightly has the Jew been called by Tholuck, “The man of a future;” everything in Israelitish annals used to appear waiting for a coming something to complete it. Thus Simon came into his place, like an athlete springing into the arena, with the full consciousness of a work to be done, and a hope to be caught. Our Lord recognised the efficiency He wished in this man, and commissioned him at once for the establishment of an organic body of believers on the earth.

The one turning-point of Simon Peter's history, on which all the rest hinges, is that at which we first meet his face, when Andrew his brother brings him to Jesus. Patriotic aspiration, personal enthusiasm, religious traditions of a matchless past—all find their fulfilment. The

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disclosure of the Messiah in Jesus pervades the entire being of this Galilean disciple ; it sways his religion from Judaism to Christianity ; it fixes his future career.

It is this alone which explains the conduct of our Lord when He chose such a man for so exalted a place, with so slight a preparation. Looking down through even the next three years—time of mighty meaning and vast import to the world—surely He foresaw, in Divine wisdom, how flexible Peter's faith was to be, how scandalously unsteady his course for a while. He understood, while Andrew stood there, introducing this strange brother, that the near future would disclose all manner of weakness in him. Simon really was going to be no Cephas at all for many a long day ; there was at the moment nothing of the *rock* in him but its roughness,—except, perhaps, its power to harden under exposures of discipline.

Can we doubt, moreover, that Jesus perceived in the distance the great shadow of the denial, and all the attendant gloom of the defection in the early Church ? No doubt, also, He foresaw the perverse dissimulation at Antioch, of which Peter would be so notoriously guilty that even Paul would withstand him to the face as one to be blamed. We may even imagine that Christ knew all the miserable folly which would follow the bestowal of that new name He was giving to this son of Jonas ; how a hierarchy of self-seekers would take it up, and fashion out of it a figment of popish successions ; how primacy and prelacy would stubbornly contend over a narrow difference between *petros* and *petra* all along down the lonely ages.

Yet our Lord Jesus chose and called to Himself this man ; advanced him to a position of authority, and laid on him His charge. From all which it would seem clear, that, while he is to be accepted as available, he cannot be pronounced altogether infallible ; he may serve well as an organiser, but he makes poor show as a pope.

Within the past year, with a small company of tourists we stood upon the crown of the low hill in Rome, where the tomb of Cecilia Metella lifts itself beside the Appian Way. We enjoyed an uninterrupted reach of vision for miles away across the Eternal City. The Sabine mountains, lengthening out their straggling outlines, shadowy and blue, formed the framework of the landscape, on one side close to the Alban Hills. But the Campagna opened wide and free: at the first, desolate and bare, save that now and then the small wild flowers in the grass lit up the marches with colour ; then, near the suburbs, there was here and there a villa ; till, at last, the confused huddle of the houses began to display their red-tiled roofs, some campaniles blackened with time, many palaces, ruins, and churches—mingled in uninteresting masses of stone structure—all that goes to make up the modern town, the mystery and majesty of Rome.

But just when the afternoon sun drew the long shadows across the plains, and that wonderful glow in the west took possession of the atmo-

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sphere—that peculiar, indescribable, familiar, ruddiness of the Roman sunset—the yellow flitting over the violet, and the purple quivering delicately in the orange, with matchless shifting and interchange of hues—we recognised those vast edifices beyond the Tiber, which are grouped around the Vatican. And over the irregular bulks of stone, rose that incomparable dome of St. Peter's Cathedral, like a round bubble in the air, "floating over the worship of the city." Then, as the wondrous beauty of that peerless cupola was disclosed, we all felt the meaning of Hawthorne's grand phrases of description, and quoted them with thorough appreciation:—

"At any nearer view, the grandeur of St. Peter's hides itself behind the immensity of its separate parts, so that we see only the front, only the sides, only the pillared length and loftiness of the portico, and not the mighty whole; but at this distance the entire outline of the world's cathedral, as well as that of the palace of the world's chief priest, is taken in at once. In such remoteness, moreover, the imagination is not debarred from rendering its assistance even while we have the reality before our eyes, and aiding the weakness of human sense to do justice to so grand an object. It requires both faith and fancy to enable us to feel, what is nevertheless so true, that yonder—in front of the purple outline of the hills—is the grandest edifice ever built by man, now painted against God's loveliest sky."

Next evening we were within the building at vespers. Down among the kneeling throng of devotees came the parting rays of the daylight, striking through the upper windows over the arches. Mysterious music echoed around us through the corridors, played by organs concealed, and sung by sweet voices out of sight.

We stood leaning upon the stone railing which surrounds what they say is the sepulchre of Simon Peter. There, they tell us, is the dust of the old fisherman waiting for the resurrection morning. High above us rose the canopy of pillared bronze, fashioned out of plates which perhaps Paul saw on the Pantheon roof when he entered this imperial city, a prisoner of the Lord in chains. Beside that crypt, beneath which is the so-called tomb of this son of Jonas in all the glory of shining candles and reverent hearts, we stood for an hour in silence, just allowing ourselves to be touched and swayed by the unseen influences around us. It does not appear like an exaggeration to say that no man with sensibilities keen and imaginative—with any measure of poetic feeling moving him—is always able to resist the tremendous force of this sensuous show. Here arises a monument, which, seen from outside or inside, is the finest thing in the world. What gave it to Simon Peter? This inevitable question keeps pressing: how did the fisherman of Galilee reach an exaltation of fame like this? How was his life lifted into historic significance such as has moved the whole world for eighteen centuries in this way? The answer is easy: Simon was the exact agent the Lord wanted to employ at that time. The explanation of all extra-

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ordinary successes in this man's life is found in the fact that Christ had a work for him, and Christ made a choice of him.

The period in this world's history, into which his life fell, shows how he was fitted at such a moment for the service given him. Great exigencies had arisen, and the dearth of true men was simply pitiful. When Simon the son of Jonas was a boy of some ten years playing among the pebbles upon the shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus of Nazareth was born at Bethlehem. Thirty years afterwards, the whole Jewish nation was swayed with a tremendous discussion concerning the coming of a Messiah; but at the same moment it was convulsed with a still more awful question, whether this Being who had moved the people so, was Himself the Christ they sought. Then all the sceptical forces in the world seemed acting restlessly at once. The Hindus' fable is that this old earth is lodged on the back of a tortoise, and frequently along the ages it occurs that the tortoise becomes wearied, and shifts its painful position: that makes an earthquake. There is something like this which is not fable: this world does rest on the back of a primeval reptile whose name is Unbelief, and now and then he turns piteously in his slime. This was what made most commotion at the time when Tiberius was emperor and Herod was king.

What was wanted was—a man. There was no lack of monarchs. But that did not help much. Inspiration has said, "For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof; but by a man of understanding and knowledge the state thereof shall be prolonged." It is an Oriental malediction down even to this present day, "May God multiply your sheikhs!" It was thought a very witty thing to say, as the old moralist put it, "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." But one who loves his country sighs when he has to admit it is true. Palestine was a poor tributary of the Roman empire; and the government found no lack of tax-gatherers for its infamous purposes of extortion among the Jews themselves. Standards of decency were scandalously lowered. Barriers against corruption were all broken down. It was to be expected—"The wicked walk on every side, when the vilest men are exalted." But when Palestine needed patriots—when the long-predicted King called for subjects—when penitents to receive and preachers to proclaim the new Gospel were wanted—there was no response. Men became more precious than gold. Where were such men to be found in that day?

Genuine men must be *looked* up, or else *raised* up. The first process is discouraging. The volatile Greeks were startled on one occasion to see Diogenes, in broad day with a lantern, peering behind every door as if he had lost something. They asked him what he sought, and the cynic replied, "I search for a man: I found a few women in Athens, and some children in Sparta; but I have never seen a man yet." There is not often much hope of that.

The Scripture expression is "raised up." We are told that the Lord

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“raised up” Othniel ; He “raised up” Moses ; He “raised up” David ; it is even said that He “raised up” Pharaoh. Hence the disclosure is beyond any contradiction, as a settled principle in the Divine government : God leaves nothing to accident. There is no good in waiting for the coming man to arrive. When the Lord is ready for his presence, He will summon him to the lead. The coming man of every great exigency in human history, so far in the annals of the race, was, after all, found to have been on the ground the whole time, only nobody knew him by his real name.

God’s choice is all that can be needed to render the most unremarkable individual eminent. Divine wisdom deliberately selected these humble but trustworthy witnesses of the Messiah’s mission and work, and in their middle life hurried them startlingly out into public notice. The evangelists count them as in no wise worthy of their pens until they have gained the dignity of a recognition from Immanuel, the Saviour of the world. But the instant they became His followers the swift record began to follow their action. As they held up the torch of truth through the prominent years of their evangelical service, and waved it widely so that all darkened men should see the face of Jesus, they could not help but that their own countenances should be unconsciously brilliant with the light which their fidelity and enthusiasm flashed around Him.

But beginnings are very frequently small and dull. And most likely there will always be found some cavillers who will wonder at the choice that was made of such persons as these first emissaries of the Gospel. Five apostles at once from a little village of seafaring men ! And Simon, son of Jonas, to be put in the lead !

Some things there are that people ought to remember. One is that Christianity, as a system of religious faith, has been definitely constructed for propagation by *rising*. Religion kindles in an upward direction—like a flame. Grades of society must be set on fire, like layers of twigs, *at the bottom*. The Jews were unphilosophical when they asked as a test question, “Have any of the rulers believed on Him ?” If they had, the common people would never have heard Him gladly. Humble souls are exalted by the reception of Jesus’ Gospel ; proud souls have to go down and be humbled before they can come up. To have attempted the conversion of that Israelitish nation through the reigning family of Herod and the nobles would have been as preposterous as to attempt to warm the sullen waters of the Dead Sea by floating beacons on its surface.

Again, it ought to be remembered that all the pressure exerted to prove these men mean and uneducated only redounds in the end to the glory of that Divine wisdom which selected them. For those mighty successes which the Gospel has achieved through their industry show the working of celestial forces in exact proportion to the human weakness involved. This is the firm and unailing retort of the ages. If men’s wisdom had taken the evangelisation of such a world in hand, it would

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have selected the profoundest rabbins, the acutest philosophers, the most eloquent orators, so as to grapple with the wilfulness of any opposition which Christianity was inevitably to receive. When Celsus urged that the apostles were "but a company of mean and illiterate persons, sorry mariners and fishermen," Origen was quick to return upon him the answer, "Then it is evident their power was from Heaven, and their religion Divine."

Still, some good people insist on thinking of Simon's after-record of inconstancy and rashness. And it strikes prudent men as risky and indiscreet to peril so much on so little—to go to such a sea-shore to begin Christianity, and to start with such a sailor.

Here, as well as elsewhere, we may settle one great principle in God's choice of men, as revealed to us in His Word. The Divine selection of agents has always been based upon *availability*, not upon goodness—upon efficiency rather than character.

If anybody chooses to go so far as to assert that Jesus, in accepting Simon Peter with so poor a prospect, intelligently made choice of a man fairly conspicuous for his defects, in order that all the glory of grand success in the future should necessarily be given to God where it belonged, it might not be easy to obtain immediate acquiescence; but he would have the privilege of quoting most appositely for his purpose the familiar text: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

But we need not go so far as that. It is not necessary that we should believe that the Lord selected Simon Peter for such an office because of these plain defects; rather, surely, in despite of them. More likely, by far, he chose him for some wonderfully fine elements of character he possessed for a certain work He had specially ordained him to do. He received him to become a Christian, of course, because he was a repentant and believing man. But as His apostle he selected Peter—as He seems all through the New Testament, and as Divine Wisdom seems all through the Old Testament, to have chosen human instruments and agents—because of executive efficiency and promise of serviceableness in the accomplishment of the extraordinary results He desired. For this truth comes out in the history always—the all-wise God selects men for an end and for an acknowledged purpose; and He grounds His preference on their real fitness to compass the end and carry out the purpose. Hence, when we go on, looking always for high virtue, seeking for exemplary superiority in goodness, and searching for

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striking evidences of perfect sainthood in the divinely-chosen instruments of history, most likely we shall be simply disappointed, and perhaps ashamed.

We are told in the Old Testament that David was a man "after God's own heart." Now, there is no need of working up a scandal at this by calling to mind David's awful sins; for, exegetically, that text means only that David was sought as the best man to execute what was in the Lord's heart. In the New Testament the rest of the verse appears added on just to guard against mistake—"I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, *which shall fulfil my will.*" That is, God had a certain purpose, and He chose David explicitly to carry it out, not because of his moral character, but because he was the most available person at hand for His use. Just so now in the case of Simon Peter.

A man was wanted: here, then, he is found. Simon Peter commences a career: it is evident that refined and elegant people are not going to judge him fairly at the beginning. He makes a dreadfully poor show. We shall have to wait a few years, and then turn to our Bibles again. We find there two letters—called, in ordinary, quick-cut phrase, First and Second Peter. Who composed those epistles? This same man? Certainly; the Bethsaida fisherman. Thoroughly educated students have said that those two fragments of inspired Scripture are finished in the finest style of Greek prose in the New Testament. Who taught this man to write? What experience was it which moulded and mellowed that hard character into refinement, into tenderness ineffable, gentleness and beauty?

There is no verse in the Bible more manifestly true than this one—"The entrance of Thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple." Insignificant indeed was the journey to Bethabara which led this man to meet his Master. But the transformation that followed it was overwhelming. A great world lies between Simon and Peter. And the "man" whom Christ chooses must be estimated wisely when the result of the choice is known. "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee."

Some respect is due to Simon Peter. It is easy enough wildly to find fault with him; but we may as well be candid. Peter is an attractive sort of man after all. He is bold, generous, tender-hearted, and earnest. Grace has a sharp fight with him, but Grace wins in the end; and while most of us are stumbling along, and exclaiming, pitifully discouraged, as did John Howard more than once, "O Lord God, why *me?*" we may as well remember that the last word this apostle ever wrote was a thoughtful admonition and counsel—"Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

It is time to have done with these cavils at the behaviour of Christian

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men. They were never set before us because of goodness. None of them are perfect. It will be well for most critics to imitate their strong points before they caricature their weak ones. Let us say to each other seriously—with all recognition of Peter's failings, and not a denial of one of them—that any man who enters heaven will not find a low seat if he is assigned a place at that old fisherman's feet!

CHAS. S. ROBINSON.

THEOLOGIANS OF THE DAY—EBRARD OF ERLANGEN.

A FEW weeks ago we attempted to render into the spirit of the English language the theological views of one of the greatest living leaders of evangelical thought in Germany. We found in Dr. Dorner the representative of a tendency which of late years has been increasingly manifested by the German mind—the tendency to render itself more English by placing at the centre of its theology not the worship of an abstract power, but the recognition of a personal life. We found that—partly by reaction from the mythicism of a Strauss and the negations of a Feuerbach, and partly by discovery of a real want in the religious life of the country, speculative philosophy had been struggling to renew its youth by assuming as its postulate the belief in a personal God. We intend on this occasion to select another living representative of what may be called this revival of religious philosophy in Germany; and out of the many that might be chosen we take Professor Ebrard of Erlangen.

We have selected Professor Ebrard because he is at once like and unlike the subject of our previous study; so like as to reveal the presence of a common tendency, so unlike as to preclude the notion of imitation or collusion. Like Dorner, he has set before him as at once the starting-point and the goal of all theology, the clear and unqualified recognition of a personal Head of the Church; the person of the God-man is in both systems the beginning, middle, and end. Like Dorner, he insists on attributing to the God-man the riches of earth as well as the riches of heaven, claims for Him the crown of nature, and sees in Him the goal of science. Yet the attitude of Ebrard towards nature is no longer the same as that of Dorner. Dorner approaches the religious problem from the stand-point of the man of science, reasons from the principles of matter and mind, and seems to use Scripture chiefly as an illustration of his conclusions; Ebrard professes to make Scripture his basis, starts by an appeal to the testimony of the written Word, and uses the page of nature, chiefly as a corroboration of the page of inspired truth. Dorner is essentially a Lutheran; Ebrard has strong proclivities