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THE FIRST FOUR BISHOPS OF ROME.

A NEW STUDY IN HISTORICAL VALUES.

BY REV. J. B. MCGOVERN, F.S.A.Scot., F.Ph.S.

THE proudest royal houses are but of yesterday, when compared with the line of the Supreme Pontiffs. That line we trace back in an unbroken series, from the Pope who crowned Napoleon in the nineteenth century to the Pope who crowned Pepin in the eighth; and far beyond the time of Pepin the august dynasty extends, till it is lost in the twilight of fable.

So wrote Macaulay in 1840 in his grandiloquent essay on Von Ranke's *History of the Popes of Rome during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, and the passage closes with equally high-flown and oft-quoted sentences:—

“She [the Roman Church] was great and respected before the Saxon had set foot on Britain, before the Frank had passed the Rhine, when Grecian eloquence still flourished in Antioch, when idols were still worshipped in the temple of Mecca. And she may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's.”

These two passages, entirely Macaulayesque, reach assuredly the high-water mark of rhetorical laudation. One wonders why the illustrious author did not, either before or after his famous Essay, make a pilgrimage to Westminster and submit to the Church in which he saw such unrivalled success, and for which he prophesied such triumphant longevity. But it is two expressions in the former paragraph—“unbroken series” and “twilight of fable”—that I purpose dealing with here. The first is a strangely inaccurate phrase to be dropped from the pen of so eminent and practised an historian as Macaulay. Nor can he be accused of a deliberate *suppressio veri* in the matter; probably (the most lenient view to take of his curious inaccuracy) his rhetoric must have overrun his knowledge, or the urge to coin telling phrases have unconsciously swamped the truth, but he must have known that the line of Supreme Pontiffs from Pius VII (1800–23) to Zacharias (741–52) was the very reverse of an “unbroken series.” Was Macaulay ignorant of the “Babylonian” Captivity of 68 years (1309–77)? Did he not know that between Pius VII and Zacharias there were thirty out of thirty-three Anti-Popes, and, many vacancies of the See, lasting in the aggregate for some twenty-nine years?¹ Did the period of the Great Schism (1378–1427) entirely slip his prodigious memory? If at any time the “line” was not “unbroken” it occurred during the vacancy of two years and five months—between the

¹ For the lists of anti-popes and vacancies, cf. Chronological Table, skilfully and carefully prepared from authentic sources, by Rev. H. F. Gaster, M.A., Lect. in Eccl. Hist., Lond. Coll. of Div., 1905–26; in *Protestant Dictionary*, 1904.

deposition of John XXIII and the election of Martin V (1415-17), and the thirty-nine others during the centuries. Up to 1870 Roman theologians explained these interregna simply on the ground that Papal Infallibility resided then in the Church and Council, but the Vatican Council's Decree rendered both deposits nugatory by defining it to be personal to the Pope alone ("Ex sese non ex consensu Ecclesiae"). In other words, the Vatican Council cut its own throat and that of all Councils past and for evermore.

The second phrase of the first paragraph—"lost in the twilight of fable"—is truer than possibly its author meant it to be. For beneath its rhetoric lies a throbbing assertion of truth, which it has been the passionate endeavour and interest of the Church of Rome to deny. The question presents itself thus primarily to the unbiased student of ecclesiastical history. (1) Was Simon Peter the First Bishop of Rome? (2) If so, what was the duration of his Pontificate? (3) Who were his first four successors? On these three questions the whole fabric of the Papal claims is reared. They are not new, but it is claimed that their present treatment in this paper is such. (1) Was Simon Peter the first Bishop of Rome? Upon the historical values of this question depend, of course, those of Nos. 2 and 3. And on the threshold of this inquiry we are confronted with Macaulay's staggering phrase, "lost in the twilight of fable." We have no means of knowing now what precise meaning he attached to it. And mere surmise is not very helpful. It may mean that its author was tolerably sure that from Napoleon to Pepin the line or series of Roman Bishops was sober history, but that from Pepin upwards it was decidedly dubiously such, and melted away gradually into the "twilight of fable" in the dusk of which Macaulay's otherwise clear vision failed to penetrate to any certainty. It is certainly a saving phrase, and aptly descriptive of the attitude of many towards this first of our three questions. But let me first clear the ground by a sub-question: Was Simon Peter ever in Rome at all? This is held to be as vital as it is thorny in the scale of questions. Can it be solved? Only by haling it to the bar of history fairly and judicially. Roman apologists cling to 1 Peter v. 13, as Scripture proof of the affirmative: *'Ἀσπάζεται ἡμᾶς ἢ ἐν βαβυλώνι συνεκλεκτῇ* (Scholz Text)—Vulgate: *Salutat vos ecclesia quæ est in Babylone coelecta*—as an allegorical allusion to Rome under the symbol of Babylon; but, as the Rev. H. W. Dearden, M.A., observes, "Symbolism does not seem in character with the rest of the Epistle."¹ Besides, the Epistle was written *from*, not *to*, Babylon.

I. WAS SIMON PETER EVER IN ROME?

Von Hase's remarks on this text are worth quoting:

"The Roman contention has detected the sole support in Holy Scripture for a residence of St. Peter in Rome in the first Epistle of St. Peter, where he offers a salutation from the Church at Babylon (1 Pet. v. 13), since they

¹ *Modern Romanism Examined*, 1909, p. 76.

are so modest as under this town of heathen abominations to consider without more ado that Rome is signified. . . . A straightforward letter, in which otherwise there is not to be found the most remote allusion to Rome. On the other hand, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, where it brings St. Paul to Rome, in the letters of St. Paul from his Roman prison, above all, in his Epistle to the Romans, in all the individual salutations in the last chapter to members of the Roman Church, we seek in vain for a hint of the presence of St. Peter there, or even for any reference to him whatever. Support is sought for the view by assuming various journeys and long absences of St. Peter from his bishopric. They must indeed have been long-continued, according to the tradition. And if a twenty-five years' bishopric is to be our conclusion, it commences in the year 43. Now we find St. Peter in the year 44 in prison. In the year 50 St. Paul meets him again in Jerusalem. The Epistle to the Romans belongs to the year 58. When St. Paul two years later comes as a prisoner to Rome, and during his long confinement there, no trace of St. Peter is to be seen; that is to say, all the time that we happen to have a more precise knowledge as to a place of sojourn of St. Peter or the circumstances of the Church in Rome, St. Peter is not to be found there." ¹

But fairness exacts that the precept *Audi alteram partem* should be borne in mind especially in this discussion. I willingly call the subjoined from Dr. Salmon's long-famous work, *Infallibility of the Church*, 1914, p. 348 :

" Plainly if Peter was ever at Rome, it was after the date of Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy (68). . . . Some Protestant controversialists have asserted that Peter was never at Rome; but though the proofs that he was there are not so strong as I should like them to be if I had any doctrine depending on it, I think the historic probability is that he was; though, as I say, at a late period of the history, and not long before his death. . . . For myself, I am willing, in the absence of any opposing tradition, to accept the current account that Peter suffered martyrdom at Rome. We know with certainty from John xxi. 18 that he suffered martyrdom somewhere. If Rome, which early laid claim to have witnessed that martyrdom, were not the scene of it, where then did it take place? . . . Baronius (in *Ann. LVIII*, § 51) owns the force of the Scripture reasons for believing that Peter was not in Rome during any time on which the New Testament throws light " (p. 350).

There is, further, the " Domine, quo vadis? " tradition, and the difficulty of proving the negative of Scripture silence, but the one is as unreliable as the other, for tradition is not history, and logic is fallible. This expresses my own view of this part of my inquiry. I then turn to the second portion, which Dr. Salmon shall again voice for me (*ibid.*, p. 349): " From the question, whether Peter ever visited Rome, we pass now to a very different question: whether he was its bishop."

II. WAS SIMON PETER EVER BISHOP OF ROME ?

What is the value of the evidence either way that gave rise to such a supposition? Let me call a new witness into the box: Bishop Moorhouse, of Manchester :

" I repeat then what I said before, that while the Roman tradition about St. Peter is plainly inconsistent with the Scriptural notices of the Roman

¹ *Handbook to the Controversy with Rome*, Von Hase, 1909, Vol. I, p. 205.

Church—there is not a scintilla of Scriptural evidence that the Apostle was ever Bishop of Rome. . . . I believe that Bishop Wordsworth is right, and that the First Epistle of St. Peter was written from Babylon. But suppose I admit the truth of the opposing contention, that St. Peter wrote this Epistle from Rome; how does this show that he was ever Bishop of that city? There is not a word in the Epistle which implies any such thing. I admit that St. Peter taught at Rome, as did also St. Paul, but I urge that it is no more legitimate to conclude from that fact that St. Peter was Bishop of Rome than that St. Paul was. Once again, I have endeavoured to prove that St. Peter's Roman Episcopate is plainly excluded by the earliest and most trustworthy tradition of the Church. I must remind you of the principal statements respecting the list of Roman Bishops made by Irenæus in the year 180. After stating that the Church of Rome 'was founded and organized by the two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul' he proceeds (*Adv. Hær.*, III, 3, 3): 'The Blessed Apostles then having founded and built up the Church, committed into the hands of Linus the office of the Episcopate . . . to him succeeded Anacletus, and after him, in the third place from the Apostles, Clement was allotted the Bishopric. To this Clement there succeeded Evaristus. Alexander followed Evaristus; then *sixth* from the Apostles Sixtus was appointed; after him Telesphorus, who was gloriously martyred; then Hyginus.' Now I would ask you to observe in this account the facts following:

- " (1) That in a loose sense of the word 'founded' the Church is said to have been founded by the two Apostles Peter and Paul.
- " (2) Both Peter and Paul appointed Linus. What the one did the other did, and we can no more say that St. Peter was Bishop of Rome for what he did than that St. Paul was.
- " (3) We find both the Apostles excluded from the Roman Episcopate by the numbering of the list. . . . This list is quoted by Eusebius in exactly the same words in his Ecclesiastical History (*E. H.*, V, 6). It is adopted by Jerome; it is accepted by Epiphanius in the East, and by Rufinus in the West, and it is contained in the Roman liturgy to the present day. If we accept this as the true statement of the Roman succession, it is certain that St. Peter was not Bishop of Rome."¹

III. WHO WERE THE FIRST FOUR BISHOPS OF ROME?

I again call upon Dr. Salmon to open the closing section of my inquiry:

"I have already stated the earliest list of Roman bishops we possess is that published by Irenæus about A.D. 180. But Irenæus was not the first to publish a list of Roman bishops. A list had been made by Hegesippus some twenty years earlier, as we learn from an extract from his writings preserved by Eusebius (*H.E.*, IV, 22). The claim of certain Gnostic sects to have derived their peculiar doctrines by secret tradition from the Apostles stirred up the members of the Catholic Church to offer proof that whatever apostolic traditions there were must be sought in those churches which had been founded by Apostles, and which could trace the succession of their bishops to men appointed by Apostles. It would seem to be with the object of collecting evidence for such a proof that Hegesippus travelled to Rome, where he arrived in the episcopate of Anicetus, which may be roughly dated as A.D. 155-165. He tells us that he then made a 'succession of bishops (*διαδοχῆν*) down to Anicetus.' He adds that Anicetus succeeded Soter, and to Soter Eleutherus, who had been deacon to Anicetus. Thus it appears that the work from which Eusebius made his extract was published in the episcopate of Eleutherus—the same Episcopate as that in which the work of Irenæus was published."²

¹ "The Roman Claims," Lecture III, 1895, pp. 4-7. ² *Ibid.*, p. 358.

Macaulay's "twilight of fable," albeit unknown to him, seems to have expressed the nebulous state which enveloped the line of succession of Roman Bishops even in the very days of its infancy, and well deserves the qualification, "Se non è vero è ben trovato."

"The lists of the earlier Roman bishops," writes the Rev. W. Heber Wright, M.A., T.C.D., in *A Protestant Dictionary*, p. 517, "as they have come down to us present discrepancies, not merely in the order of succession but in names and dates. Tertullian and others make Clement the immediate successor of Peter, while Irenæus gives the order: (1) Linus, (2) Anacletus, (3) Clement. From the very start, therefore, the Roman Episcopal succession is involved in doubt and obscurity. We append the Roman authorised list (according to Dr. Bruno, *Catholic Belief*, London, 1902) up to A.D. 335. This list coincides with that of Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History*):

	Assumed date.
	A.D.
Peter (?)	29-67
Linus (?)	67
Cletos (?)	78
Clement I	90

The first three alleged Roman Bishops are rightly queried, and Mr. Gaster (*ibid.*, p. 809), in his annotated list of Pontiffs, supplies a list of his authorities as subjoined:

"The following list of Bishops and Pontiffs of Rome is based on the list compiled by the well-known Jesuit writers, Philip Labbé and Gabriel Cossart, and printed in the work entitled *Sacrosancta Concilii*. This list has been compared with the lists of Bishops and Pontiffs compiled respectively by l'Abbé Migne, le Comte de Mas-Latrie, and the Very Rev. Dr. Bruno, so as to secure, whenever possible, the combined testimony of these authorities."

The divergencies between these modern leaders of Roman history on this matter would be ludicrous if they were not so serious. Here are a few instances from this "Table":

Under Anacletus, 78-90.

1. "Some authorities place him No. 5 in the list, and place here the name Cletus" (p. 810).
2. "Stephen III, 757-67. L'Abbé Migne places here Paul I, but Labbé and Cossart, and also Mas-Latrie, support the order adopted in this Table."
3. "Formosus, 891-96. Sergius, by some authorities called an Antipope, and Boniface VI. Dr. Bruno includes both in his list; but neither of them was properly elected to the Chair."
4. "Romanus, 897. L'Abbé Migne places Romanus in the list of Pontiffs as No. 113. Mas-Latrie places him in the list, but dates him 897-8. So also Bryce and Dr. Bruno. Labbé and Cossart class him as an Antipope."

And so these edifying discrepancies continue down to Leo XI, 1605, whom Dr. Bruno dates 1600, and Paul V (1605-21), 1605.

The "combined testimonies" of these modern Roman chronologists yield nothing but utter unreliability and "confusion worse confounded," and one cannot but marvel at the irony of fate that it was reserved to two Protestant clergymen to discover their inaccuracies and contradictions. Even Simon Peter himself has not escaped the pen of misrepresentation, as evidenced in the famous

Non videbis amos Petri (belied in the case of Pius IX), Bishop Serapion's *Gospel of Peter* (Edited by Rendall Harris, 1893), and "Was St. Peter a Buddhist Saint?" (*Home Words*, September, 1929).

Although it is foreign to the purpose of this paper to discuss the attributes attributed by Roman theologians to Simon Peter and his alleged successors in the See of Rome, I judge it expedient to refer to a passage in a volume entitled *The Church*, 1928, containing a series of lectures edited by Rev. C. Lattey, S.J. The passage occurs at the paper headed "The Ante-Nicene Fathers," by Rev. Dr. P. G. M. Rhodes, Professor of Dogmatic Theology at Oscott, to show on the one hand that those attributes are still claimed for every link in the assumed "unbroken" chain of Supreme Pontiffs from Linus (or Simon Peter) to Benedict XI, and on the other that even eminent opponents of those attributes must be whitewashed or explained away:

"We may now apply these principles that we have established to the question that for Catholics is both the most important and the most interesting in the ecclesiology of the early Church, namely, the recognition of the successor of St. Peter in the See of Rome as the divinely appointed head of the Church on earth. It is plain that the exact implications of the promise made by our Lord to St. Peter required careful consideration and a considerable lapse of time before they could be perceived in their fullness. 'Whosoever thou shalt bind on earth . . . The gates of hell . . . The gates of hell shall not prevail . . . Feed My sheep.' What did it all imply for St. Peter's successor? Right to excommunicate heretics? The right to supervise and admonish other Bishops? That was plain enough from the beginning. No one contemplated the possibility of the Catholic Church not being in communion with the Apostolic See of Rome. Gnostics and Monarchians knew well enough that if the Roman See accepted them as orthodox they had nothing to fear elsewhere. But did it include the power of the Bishop of Rome to supervise the disciplinary arrangements of other Churches? Had the Pope necessarily the right to hear appeals from the decision of other bishops? Could he interfere between a priest and his own bishop? Could he set aside the instructions that St. John was believed to have given to the Churches he founded? Suppose he acts unjustly or hastily, may his instructions be ignored? Many such questions presented themselves in the early ages of the Church, and not every Father succeeded in answering them correctly at the first attempt. In the Ante-Nicene period the doctrine of the Papacy remains in the first stage; the position of the Bishop of Rome as the successor of the Chief of the Apostles is accepted as a matter of course, and acts that imply universal jurisdiction arouse no complaint in that respect. St. Irenæus rebuked St. Victor [193-204] for what appeared harshness in threatening to excommunicate the East; but there was no suggestion that St. Victor had not the power to carry his threat into effect. But, for the most part, attention was simply not drawn towards the particular personal powers that the Bishop of Rome might possess. The Christian of this period did not ask himself whether the Pope was infallible. The Church was infallible, and the Apostolic See was always with the Church. Would a Catholic of the Ante-Nicene period have accepted the Vatican definition of Papal Infallibility? He might have been astonished at what would be an unheard-of way of putting it, but after having the meaning clearly explained to him, would have agreed that it expressed, in an apparently paradoxical way, what he himself believed. At the same time, difficulties might have been raised by certain thinkers in quite good faith, who were influenced by 'early theories,' just beginning to appear, on the constitution of the Church.

On this subject, as on most others, the first theorizers did not succeed in including all the factors of the problem. The name that at once occurs to us is that of St. Cyprian; and I think it must be conceded that St. Cyprian propounded theories that are not completely reconcilable with the later formal teaching of the Church" (pp. 95-7).

It is needless to prolong this passage, which is a virtual excuse for Cyprian's attitude towards Pope Stephen (253-7)—much as the writer would offer for Erasmus, Lord Acton, or Rev. George Tyrrell. Let me, however, offer an animadversion on a few sentences therein.

(1) In the Ante-Nicene period (29-325) the doctrine of the Papacy remains in the first stage; the position of the Bishop of Rome as the successor of the Chief of the Apostles is accepted as a matter of course, and acts that imply universal jurisdiction arouse no complaint on that respect. I doubt very much whether Hermas (150), or Papias (150), or Hippolytus (230) would have subscribed to this confident statement, still less the bulk of Christians of that period. Certainly the latter would have been more than "astonished" at the language of the Vatican definition of Papal Infallibility. Anyway, Dr. Rhodes himself provides us with two outstanding instances of the inaccuracy of his own assertion, though whittled down almost to zero, as evidenced by this cautious sentence (p. 97):

"It is not unfair to point out that St. Cyprian is not among the great Doctors of the early Church. He is canonized by the Church, not as a Doctor, but as a Martyr; though the Canonization implies that his teaching was not fundamentally or finally uncatholic . . . but in view of his lack of real theological preparation, there was ever the danger that details of doctrine, quietly accepted in simple faith by the Church at large, but not much considered or discussed, might be misunderstood, or even overlooked by him. This is, in fact, what happened."

Moss' revised edition (1929) of Robertson's *Sketches of Church History* (p. 33) provides a fairer (because less biased) estimate of this Stephen-Cyprian episode thus:

"Cyprian had a disagreement with Stephen, Bishop of Rome. . . . Now, the bishops who were at the head of this great church were naturally reckoned the foremost of all bishops, and had more power than any other; so that if a proud man got the bishopric of Rome, it was too likely that he might try to set himself up above his brethren, and to lay down the law to them. Stephen was unhappily a man of this kind, and he gave way to the temptation, and tried to lord it over other bishops and their churches. But Cyprian held out against him, and made him understand that the bishop of Rome had no right to give laws to other bishops, or to meddle with the churches of other countries. He showed that, although St. Peter (from whom Stephen pretended that the bishops of Rome had received power over others) was the first of the Apostles, he was not of a higher class or order than the rest; and therefore, that, although the Roman bishops stood first, the other bishops were their equals, and had received an equal share in the Christian ministry. So Stephen was not able to get the power which he wished for over other churches, and, after his death, Carthage and Rome were at peace again."

(3) A note of uncertainty concludes Dr. Rhodes' paper (p. 109).

"Whether St. Cyprian was ever really out of communion with the Holy See must remain uncertain. We have hardly any information, except in

the exaggerated and ill-tempered letter of Firmilian. Nor have we any positive information about St. Cyprian's relations with Stephen's successor, St. Xystus. But Xystus afterwards enjoyed the reputation among the Africans of 'a kindly and peace-loving bishop, which suggests an amelioration of relationship.'

This confirms Robertson's verdict; yet the entire paper is a smart, one-sided presentment of the famous case, and an unblushing whitewashing of both Pope and Bishop.

To the S.P.C.K. series of "Manuals of the Inner Life" Canon J. B. Lancelot has contributed a most helpful little book, *The Religion of the Collects* (2s. 6d. net). The Collects are, as he says, "not only a rich treasury of devotion, but a casket containing much pure and suggestive wisdom." In issuing these meditations, which originally appeared in the *Liverpool Review*, Canon Lancelot will help many readers to realize some of the best lessons which the Collects have to teach. Although the Meditations are brief, they are packed with suggestive ideas, and they will require some thought on the reader's part to gain and retain the valuable truths set out. Each collect is made to yield up its central truth and its bearing on religious experience and its relationship to the whole Christian System centred in Christ.

Miss Gertrude Leigh has put forward a novel interpretation of Dante's *Inferno* in her book *New Light on the Youth of Dante*, the Course of Dante's Life prior to 1290 traced in *The Inferno*, Cantos 3-13 (Faber and Faber, Ltd., 15s. net). Her view is expressed in the second portion of the title—that Dante under the figure of a journey through the lower regions is giving an account of his own early experiences, and a criticism of the ecclesiastical authorities of his day in a manner that saved him from the penalties which a plain narrative would have involved, and at the same time gave scope for his powers of artistic expression. This allegorical purpose is worked out with a wealth of detail, and "the implications involved in the recognition of a contemporary narrative of historical events underlying that tale of damned and tortured souls which has hitherto been accepted as a sample of Dante's religious convictions" show his design of exposing the errors of the Papal administration and vindicating his own conduct by affording a secret history of his life and times. The repressive power of the Courts would have prevented him expressing the views which Miss Leigh attributes to him. Much study and thought have been devoted to the working out of this ingenious theory, and it presents a rich array of interesting facts in a peculiarly interesting epoch.