

Theology on the *Web*.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbadshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

THE
CHURCHMAN

A Monthly Magazine

*CONDUCTED BY CLERGYMEN AND LAYMEN
OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND*



VOL. XI.



LONDON
ELLIOT STOCK, 62, PATERNOSTER ROW
1885

abridgment and translation.¹ For this piece of work, it seems, Johnson received five guineas. Lobo mentions that "the kingdom of Amhara is mountainous. The Abyssinians² call these steep rocks 'Amba.'" The title of Dr. Johnson's story is taken from *Rassela*, the name of the Abyssinian Sultan's general in Lobo's time.³

Mr. Stock's tasteful edition of the classic, as has been remarked, is very welcome. Like his other facsimiles, it shows much care and skill.



ART. IV.—SAINTS' DAYS IN THE CHURCH'S YEAR. II. FEBRUARY. THE CHOICE OF MATTHIAS.

A. THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE.

"*And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen.*"—ACTS i. 24.

THE choice lay betwixt two. To this point the question had been narrowed by the disciples, who were themselves able to judge of certain requisite qualifications: and now the final decision was referred to the Lord Christ, Who knows, what none of His disciples can know, the true condition and disposition of the heart.

It was the first step taken in Church organization, the first fact recorded in Church history after those meetings for prayer in the Upper Chamber which took place on the return from Mount Olivet.⁴ It was probably in the same solemn Upper Chamber that they met now.⁵ The number of the disciples was "about a hundred and twenty."⁶ This was then the whole visible Church of Christ. Of the "five hundred," who were together at an earlier moment subsequent to the Resurrection,⁷ some were in Galilee; some were probably in various parts of Judæa; many, no doubt, were "secret"⁸

¹ Lobo's *Historia de Ethiopia* appeared in 1659.

² On the title-page of "Rasselas" we find "Abissinia;" and throughout the volumes Abyssinia is spelt in the same way. Why it is so cannot be explained, as the Jesuit writer has "Abyssinia." Another mystery is that whereas the work was advertised in 1759 as "Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia," on the title-page "Rasselas" did not appear.

³ Of his translation of Lobo, Boswell tells us, Johnson had but a poor opinion. In 1776, Boswell had borrowed a copy of the rarity, and, as was his wont, he talked of it; but the Doctor said, "Take no notice of it."

⁴ Acts i. 12, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, i. 15.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ 1 Cor. xv. 6.

⁸ See John xix. 38.

disciples, without, as yet, the courage to declare themselves. The little body of a hundred and twenty in Jerusalem represented the whole, and acted for the whole.

"Twelve" Apostles had been chosen.¹ The number "twelve" was a predestinated number, in mysterious symmetry with the number of the tribes. The Apostles were commonly spoken of as "the Twelve." The number of thrones designed for them was twelve. They were the twelve stars that made up the Church's crown. One of them had been "lost," and now the vacant place was to be filled up. It was a striking moment in the history of God's economy for man's salvation: a moment well deserving to be strongly marked in the Sacred Volume: and the record of it diffuses manifold instruction for all time over all parts of the Church.

We can only glance at a part of this instruction; but let us observe the stress laid in the preceding verses on the *qualifications* of the new Apostle: "Of these men which have accompanied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection."² Here are three qualifications distinctly indicated as requisite. First, Christianity is an historical religion, and it was essential that its first Apostles should have a thorough knowledge of the facts of the case: the Twelve were, above all things, required to be able to testify of what they had known and seen. Secondly, mere knowledge, however complete, was not enough. Many men have abundant knowledge, but are destitute of the courage of their convictions. Such men, however, are not fit to be Apostles. It was felt that those among whom the choice lay on this grave occasion must not only be well acquainted with the facts that were to be announced, but must have proved the earnestness of their faith by their own consistency from the beginning to the end. They must have been "companions"

¹ "The number of the Apostolic company is significant, and was doubtless a matter of choice, not less than was the composition of the selected band. . . The number was recommended by obvious symbolic reasons. It happily expressed in figures what Jesus claimed to be, and what He had come to do, and thus furnished a support to the faith and a stimulus to the devotion of His followers. It was significantly hinted that Jesus was the divine Messianic King of Israel, come to set up the kingdom whose advent was foretold by prophets, when the theocratic community existed in its integrity, and all the tribes of the chosen nation were united under the royal house of David. That the number 'twelve' was designed to bear such a mystic meaning we know from Christ's words to the Apostles, Matt. xix. 28."—Dr. Bruce on "The Training of the Twelve," p. 32.

² Verses 21, 22.

with the rest "all the time"—must have committed themselves to discipleship ; not have merely climbed up to some safe place to see Jesus passing by ; not shouted in His honour at one moment and denied Him at the next ; but must have been continuous in their personal public testimony to the Saviour. And, thirdly, the new Apostle must be such a one as could be "witness to the Resurrection." We might give attention here—and if we were attempting to exhaust our subject, we should be bound to give attention—to the great prominence assigned to the Resurrection, as the cardinal fact upon which the preaching of the Gospel rested. But we are considering the *qualifications* of the new Apostle. He was to be able to bear witness, with the rest, to the resurrection of Christ. In the literal sense, indeed, no one ever was witness of that resurrection. But to the fact that He was risen there were witnesses—assembled witnesses—and, no doubt, almost precisely these same one hundred and twenty—on the first Easter Evening. These two men, between whom the choice now lay, were doubtless among those whom the two disciples found gathered together on their return from Emmaus,¹ and to whom the solemn words were spoken : "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you : Receive ye the Holy Ghost : whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them ; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained."²

Now in this strong statement of necessary qualifications a great principle is involved. When a man is appointed to a responsible post he ought to be fit for that post. Especially is this the case when the office he is to hold has reference to Religion. In this case of the choice of Matthias we have the principle asserted on which all Christian *patronage* is conducted. It matters not whether this matter is in the hands of a state officer, or an ecclesiastical officer, or a private proprietor, or a body of public electors. In every instance those who have the choice, or a share in the choice, are bound to do their best to ascertain the presence of the requisite qualifications. By what method it was decided in this instance—whether by deliberate voting, or by a strong simultaneous impulse—that Barnabas and Matthias were the two between whom the final selection was to be made, we do not know, and it is of no consequence that we should inquire. It was agreed that the new Apostle must satisfy the religious conditions of the case. Through the neglect of this principle, in the exercise of patronage, much harm has been done in all ages since, and in much dishonour inflicted on the Christian name.

But still, God only knows the heart. With the utmost pains

¹ Luke xxiv. 33.

² John xx. 22, 23.

taken to ascertain that the requisite qualifications are present, human mistakes, after all, may be made. At a certain point man's vision becomes utterly powerless. This was deeply felt on this occasion, when St. Matthias was chosen into the Apostolate. The assembled disciples had done their best. They agreed to nominate two, who satisfied all the outward religious conditions of the moment ; but which of the two was the more fitted for this great work, which of them God Himself had chosen, they could not know. The final decision they referred entirely to God. "They prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen."

Here, too, is the assertion of a great principle peculiarly worthy of attention in this month of the year. The festival, indeed, of St. Matthias is fixed, while the time of the beginning of Lent is variable. Still the latter part of February is never far from the early Ember week. Let us now, therefore, having given some thought to the question of patronage, turn to the question of *ordination*. Not that this setting apart of Matthias can properly be termed an ordination. He received His appointment, as the other Apostles had received theirs, direct from Christ. He was not set apart by the laying on of hands, as Timothy was, for example,¹ or those whom Timothy himself ordained.² But this kind of prayer, the recognition of the truth that God only "knows the heart," is at no time more requisite than in an Ember week immediately before an ordination. It happens, as has been remarked, that the festival of St. Matthias is very near an ordination : and in this present year it actually falls within the space of the Ember week : and in our churches we shall be reminded of this by the special collects, in which we pray that the minds of the Bishops may be wisely guided, and that those ordained may be endowed with inward grace.

Let the occurrence of this festival of St. Matthias within the Ember week be a help to us in the discharge of this duty of intercessory prayer. The duty of human prudence and scrutiny before ordination is attested in those admonitory words of the Bishop when the candidates are presented before him : "Take heed that the persons, whom ye present unto us, be apt and meet, for their learning and godly conversation, to exercise their ministry duly." But a far deeper point is touched in the question addressed to the candidates themselves : "Do you think, in your heart, that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost?" These words relate to subjects far beyond the range

¹ 1 Tim. iv. 14 ; 2 Tim. i. 6.

² 1 Tim. v. 22.

of human inquiry. Into this region we penetrate only by Prayer.

B. ONE SUCCEEDED BY ANOTHER.

“God is the Judge; He putteth down one, and setteth up another.”—
Ps. lxxiv. 7.

This is the one festival of our Church-year which we approach with feelings of depression and pain. The mere commemoration of a death would not produce these feelings. The celebration of a martyrdom is not depressing and painful, but elevating and joyous. Who is not conscious, when he remembers the death of Stephen, that the death was glorious and full of benediction for all future ages? Even in the case of the “Innocents,” the mere human sorrow of Rachel “weeping for her children,”¹ is a very small part of that which excites our emotions. Our thoughts soon pass into a higher sphere: we reflect on the place of children in the kingdom of Heaven: we feel that even the sufferings of children are glorified by the Gospel; and we learn that, in a very high sense, they are our teachers.

But the death of Judas stands solemnly apart by itself. That death was no martyrdom—was no glorifying of God’s Holy Name, but a fearful dishonouring of that Name. The thought of suicide fills with horror every well-constituted mind. It is felt to be an awful interference with the relation in which we stand towards the Almighty. Some say that suicide is a crime, because it is a breach of the Sixth Commandment. He that takes away his own life is viewed as guilty of murder. But in this mode of stating the case there is confusion of thought. The true definition of a crime has regard to the motives with which it was wrought. Now, the motives which lead to the commission of suicide are commonly quite different from the motives which lead to the commission of murder. Hence the two crimes are different in their character. The mere taking away of life does not constitute the essence of murder. This feature is accidentally common to the two crimes. The man who takes away another man’s life by accident is not a murderer. The judge who condemns a criminal to death is not a murderer. The soldier, whose bullet strikes the heart of an unknown opponent in battle, is not a murderer. The main feature of suicide is probably this, that a man who destroys his own life dethrones God from that position of supreme decision and control which belongs to Him as the God of Providence. He takes his fate, as it were, into his own

¹ Jer. xxxi. 15; Matt. ii. 18.

of human inquiry. Into this region we penetrate only by Prayer.

B. ONE SUCCEEDED BY ANOTHER.

“God is the Judge; He putteth down one, and setteth up another.”—
Ps. lxxiv. 7.

This is the one festival of our Church-year which we approach with feelings of depression and pain. The mere commemoration of a death would not produce these feelings. The celebration of a martyrdom is not depressing and painful, but elevating and joyous. Who is not conscious, when he remembers the death of Stephen, that the death was glorious and full of benediction for all future ages? Even in the case of the “Innocents,” the mere human sorrow of Rachel “weeping for her children,”¹ is a very small part of that which excites our emotions. Our thoughts soon pass into a higher sphere: we reflect on the place of children in the kingdom of Heaven: we feel that even the sufferings of children are glorified by the Gospel; and we learn that, in a very high sense, they are our teachers.

But the death of Judas stands solemnly apart by itself. That death was no martyrdom—was no glorifying of God’s Holy Name, but a fearful dishonouring of that Name. The thought of suicide fills with horror every well-constituted mind. It is felt to be an awful interference with the relation in which we stand towards the Almighty. Some say that suicide is a crime, because it is a breach of the Sixth Commandment. He that takes away his own life is viewed as guilty of murder. But in this mode of stating the case there is confusion of thought. The true definition of a crime has regard to the motives with which it was wrought. Now, the motives which lead to the commission of suicide are commonly quite different from the motives which lead to the commission of murder. Hence the two crimes are different in their character. The mere taking away of life does not constitute the essence of murder. This feature is accidentally common to the two crimes. The man who takes away another man’s life by accident is not a murderer. The judge who condemns a criminal to death is not a murderer. The soldier, whose bullet strikes the heart of an unknown opponent in battle, is not a murderer. The main feature of suicide is probably this, that a man who destroys his own life dethrones God from that position of supreme decision and control which belongs to Him as the God of Providence. He takes his fate, as it were, into his own

¹ Jer. xxxi. 15; Matt. ii. 18.

hands. It is usurpation and resistance in its most absolute form. Perhaps we might say that if the essence of murder is hatred, the essence of suicide is discontent.

A dark shade for ever rests upon the grave of Judas. But this is not all. Most terrible words are spoken of him in Scripture in reference to the world beyond the grave. The story of the death of Ananias and Sapphira is fearful. It hangs about the minds of children with a most salutary warning of the wickedness and peril of all prevarication. But still that story ends with the carrying out of those two unhappy sinners to their grave. Nothing is said of the world beyond. But of Judas it is said that he fell by transgression from "his ministry and apostleship" that he might go "to his own place."¹ What that place is no words of man can at present describe. But it was a place to which he now legitimately belonged. The phrase describes a doom not in this world but in the other; and at an earlier time the Lord Himself had said of him that should betray Him, that it had been "good for that man if he had not been born."² These words must surely be regarded as among the most awful in Scripture; for if at any time hereafter, even at the end of ages of suffering, Judas came to be restored to the favour and the light of God's countenance, and raised to the purity and love of Heaven, then to Judas it would be not an evil, but an infinite good that he had been born.

This, however, is not the subject on which we desire chiefly to dwell, when on St. Matthias's Day we commemorate the choice of Matthias to fill the place of Judas. "God is the Judge." To Him we must leave the assigning of all places in the other world according to the rules of infallible justice. Let us turn to another topic, which comes to us from the same verse of the Psalm. "God is the judge: He putteth down one and setteth up another." He is constantly filling up vacant places—constantly calling new men to discharge the duties of those who are gone. "His bishopric let another take"³—his responsibility, whatever it may have been, which the man for a time discharged, let it now be laid on another—this is a law of our human life which is in the course of perpetual fulfilment.

All through the Scripture instances of this succession are made so conspicuous, that they are manifestly intended to impress upon us a great truth. Abraham dies and is buried in the grave of Machpelah: and Isaac is now at the head of the patriarchal world. Moses takes his last look of the

¹ Acts i. 25.

² Matt. xxvi. 24.

³ Acts i. 20.

promised land, which he is not to enter: and Joshua goes in and conquers. David breathes his last amid sad recollections and sad forebodings; and Solomon, with the people shouting and his mother exulting, ascends the throne. Elijah goes to heaven in a chariot of fire; and now the successor of the terrible prophet, before whom kings trembled, is Elisha, who is described as the gentle, beneficent, "holy man of God who passeth by us continually."¹ For it is not only the *fact* of succession, which we ought to note as an inevitable, perpetually recurring feature of our human life, but also this, that the new man who is called to succeed the old is commonly *quite different in character* from the former. We have only to compare Isaac with Abraham, Joshua with Moses, Solomon with David, Elisha with Elijah, and nothing more is needed to point the lesson.

All this shows to us that God can govern the world very well without us. The plan of His Providence is large, far beyond our comprehension. Our place in that plan is very small. Our life on this earth lasts but a very little time. He dismisses us when He has need of us no longer, and some successor is called to take our place. "He putteth down one and setteth up another." If we may adopt the words used on a memorable occasion of our Lord's ministry, "He saith to that man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh."²

But in that narrative, if we may so quote it, there is another phrase, to which we are bound to give good heed. "He saith to his servant, Do this, and he doeth it." How is it with us as regards our obedience to this supreme command, during our period of responsibility? We are, indeed, each of us but a short time here on earth: but during that short time we have each of us a duty that is laid on us; and how are we discharging it? To every man is assigned, in a modified sense, "a ministry and apostleship." Every man has a service to perform; every man is sent to do something before the hour of his departure arrives. It is good for us, now that we are again approaching the season of Lent, to begin to think of these things more seriously than ever before.

J. S. HOWSON.

¹ 2 Kings iv. 9.

² Matt. viii. 9.