

AN ANGLICAN ON THE 'TWO WITNESSES'

In August and October, 1926, the Anglican Quarterly, *Theology*, published two remarkable articles written by the Ireland Professor of Exegesis at Oxford (C. H. Turner) and entitled 'St. Peter in the New Testament.' Their writer was a scholar of such competence in Biblical and Patristic studies that his advocacy of the Petrine claims made his articles the most important work on Anglo-Roman controversy since Newman's *Development*.

One point especially was almost a startling innovation which might have identified an anonymous writer not with England but with Rome. Let the writer make the point in his own words:

'It cannot be reasonably questioned that the thought of Rome, the imperial city, the stronghold of the anti-Christian power, is very close to the mind of the seer (*i.e.* St. John in writing the Apocalypse) in certain points of his vision.

'The Beast is the emperor and the *head slain to death and his death-wound was healed* (Apoc. xiii, 3) can be no other than Nero, the expectation of whose return from the East was so vivid till the end of the first century.

'Now the *Beast that comes up from the depths or from the sea* (xi, 7; xiii, 1) *made war with the saints and overcame them and put them to death, and his victims were the two Witnesses* (should we not rather render the Greek word literally as *Martyrs*?) *whose bodies were exposed in the streets of the Great City which is called spiritually Sodom and Egypt where also their Lord was crucified* (xi, 8). The Great City equated with the Old Testament types of sin and oppression; responsible for the crucifixion of Him who suffered under Pontius Pilate is the Roman power and nothing else.

'But who then were the two martyrs?

'They are described in terms borrowed from the Old Testament descriptions of Moses and Elias. But Moses and Elias had nothing to do with Rome and were neither of them martyrs.

'But there were two martyrs of the first persecution whose names were always associated in Christian tradition with Nero the first persecutor (*passi sunt sub Nerone*); the two greatest figures in early Christian history, St. Peter and St. Paul.

'I believe myself that the Seer of the Apocalypse gives the earliest expression in extant Christian literature to the combination of the memory of the two great Apostles. Before the first

century reached its close the two names were enshrined in common in the minds of all members, Jewish or Gentile, of the one Universal Church' (*Theology*, Oct., 1926, pp. 196, 197).

1. We have said that these two articles by an Anglican professor of unusual competence were 'almost a startling innovation.'

Catholic biblical scholars like Père Allo, O.P. (*L'Apocalypse*, 1921), or Fr. Hugh Pope, O.P. (*Layman's New Testament*, 1927), have not suggested the possibility suggested by an Anglican that these witnesses under Nero were St. Peter and St. Paul; and that the word 'witnesses' should be 'martyrs.'

2. The Anglican professor's induction about the word witnesses is confirmed by the Latin translation of the Greek *martus* or *martur*. In the New Testament this Greek word is used some thirty-four times. But only once, and that in the Apocalypse (xvii, 5), is the Greek original rendered by the Latin word 'martyres.'

3. As St. Peter and St. Paul suffered under Nero, A.D. 67, and as St. John wrote his Apocalypse about A.D. 96, it is significant that in order to express the idea of a Christian martyr the Latin Church follows its habitual way of transliterating a Greek word, e.g. *episcopus*, *presbyter*, etc. This technical use of the transliterated Greek word martyr to mean a Christian who had suffered death for Christ would date the Apocalypse towards the close of the first century.

Moreover, it was not death for Christ that justified the title of martyr; it was *officially recognised* death for Christ. It was only the *martyr vindicatus* who was officially called martyr. But this technical word *vindico* is significantly found twice in the Apocalypse; and found in conjunction with the martyr's blood-shedding:

'I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held.

'And they cried with a loud voice saying: *How long, O Lord, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge (judicas) and revenge (vindicas) our blood* (vi, 9, 10).

'After these things I heard as it were the voice of much people in heaven saying: *Alleluia, salvation and glory and power is to our God.*

'*For true and just are his judgments, who hath judged (judicavit) the great harlot which corrupteth the earth with her fornication, and hath revenged (vindicated) the blood of his servants at her hands*' (xix, 1, 2).

4. St. John wrote the Apocalypse some thirty years after the martyrdom of St. Peter and St. Paul. They were years of such freedom from persecution that the burial-places of the saints became centres of pilgrimages. Around the tomb of St. Peter on the Vati-

can Hill were laid the bodies of his successors, Linus, Cletus, Clement and Anacletus.

Of Anacletus it is said that he built a monument (*memoriam beati Petri construxit et composuit—Liber Pontificalis*, v). As this public and striking act of reverence for the body of St. Peter took place few years before the writing of the Apocalypse, it is not fantastic to see a reference to it in the words :

'They of the tribes and peoples and tongues and nations shall see their bodies for three and a half days.

'And they shall not suffer their carcasses to be laid in *sepulchres*' [mnema] (xi, 9).

The New Testament has another Greek word for sepulchre, or monumentus, i.e. *mnemeion*. This word is used forty-three times. But the word *mnema* is used only six times, and always means a monument hewn in a rock or cave; like the Catacombs, in which the bodies of St. Peter and St. Paul were laid!

5. A further item confirming the thesis is in the words describing the two olive trees and the two candlesticks: 'They have power to shut heaven' (xi, 6). We can hardly fail to recall: 'I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth it shall be bound also in heaven' (Matt. xvi, 19).

6. The word here translated 'candlestick' is almost peculiar to St. John. Elsewhere in the New Testament it is used five times. In the Apocalypse St. John uses it seven times and always with the meaning of Christian ecclesiastical authority. No wonder he uses it to express the two Christian apostles who witnessed under Nero.

7. But perhaps for anyone who realises the almost mathematical planning of the Apocalypse the strongest evidence is not one of words, but of chapters.

If the eleventh chapter deals with the two supreme Martyrs whom Rome put to death, chapter the twelfth deals with Our Blessed Lady :

'And a great sign appeared in heaven—a Woman clothed with the Sun and the Moon under her feet and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (xii, 1).

Still more striking is what follows :

'And I beheld, and lo! a Lamb stood up on Mount Sion and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads' (xiv, 1).

There is no need to develop this striking argument. It is clear that St. John is calling attention to a series of persons: (i) St. Peter and St. Paul; (ii) Our Blessed Lady; and (iii) Jesus Christ.

VINCENT McNABB, O.P.