

SACRED LEGENDS.

FOURTEENTH PAPER.

THE EVANGELISTS.—(Continued.)

St. John, the beloved disciple, the great apostle, the mysterious prophet, is the last named, but the greatest of the Evangelists; his figure is the *eagle*, typifying by its heavenward flights the sublime imagery of his gospel—the gospel that wings its way at once to the contemplation of the godhead. He is the author of the Apocalypse—the prophetic revelations which God gave unto him to make known to his servants “the things which must shortly come to pass.” He appeared to have been constantly with our Lord. He was one of the favoured three at the Transfiguration he leaned on the bosom of his Master at the Last Supper, he remained in the Garden of Sorrows, he stood under the Cross, he laid the dead Saviour in the tomb. It was to him that our Lord gave His Blessed Mother in charge as a son, and gave her as a mother to him; he is expressly the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” the glorious and highly-favoured apostle, the sublime evangelical writer, the transcendent prophet exalted to the contemplation of a new heaven and a new earth.

St. John was the brother of St. James, both sons of Zebedee, a fisherman in Galilee. He is said to have been the youngest of all the apostles and to have been one of the first to follow our Lord. He had been a follower of St. John the Baptist when that great herald was preaching the Advent of the Messiah, and he and his brother left “their nets and father and followed Him.” The four fishermen apostles—two brothers in each family—were closely connected in intimacy. St. Peter and St. John were cherished companions, though they were separated in their missionary labours. St. John, true to his trust, remained chiefly in Judea during the life-time of the Blessed Virgin; afterwards he founded and took charge of the Seven Churches in Asia and resided at Ephesus. He wrote his gospel in Greek about sixty years after the ascension; the apocalypse was not written till towards the close of his life. He was summoned to Rome by order of Domitian and thrown into a caldron of boiling oil, but he escaped uninjured. He was afterwards banished to Patmos, the scene of his prophetic revelations. After the lapse of two years, when Domitian died, St. John returned to Ephesus, where he died at a very advanced age, having survived all the other apostles. The Greek legends assign him a peaceful death. There is a tradition—not accepted, however—that he did not die at all, that his body was miraculously preserved with Enoch and Elijah to preach against anti-Christ in the last days.* The cup and serpent often seen in paintings of the Saint refer to the attempt made at Rome to poison him. A hired assassin put poison with the wine in the chalice, but by a miracle the poison issued therefrom in the form of a serpent. The saint drank and administered the contents to the communicants without injury, while the assassin fell dead. The story is told in many ways—some say that the order came from Domitian and that subsequently the saint was banished as one practising magic. A magistrate in Patmos, seeing the miracles of John, and desiring to get rid of him, offered to become one of his disciples if he would drink a powerful poison. The holy man agreed and drank the contents of the poisoned cup unharmed. There is a legend that when he began his gospel, proclaiming the Word, a clap of thunder resounded through the serene sky—an allusion to the name our Lord bestowed on him—“the Son of Thunder.” There is more narrated of this Evangelist than of any other apostle in the New Testament, and as may, therefore, be expected, there are not very many legends. Nothing is more beautiful than the affection between him and his Divine Master at the Last Supper,—the sacred trust of His mother under the cross—the anxiety displayed at the news of the Resurrection. St. Chrysostom says that when all the other apostles fled when our Lord was apprehended, St. John alone remained. In many ways he shewed himself the beloved disciple.

Such are a few of the legends relating to the evangelists, the apostles and our Lord and his Blessed Mother. We began with the mother, in what seemed the order of nature, but, as

* See John 21: 21, 22, giving rise to this legend.

was said, these legends all refer and can only refer to our Divine Lord. In writing them no very ambitious plan was carried out, nor indeed thought of; the work has been a labour of love, and the writer lays down his pen with regret. The papers could have been continued for many numbers yet to come but other work must be attended to—work that seems more necessary though it is not so congenial. The writer is in hopes that by putting these papers in better shape and having them duly submitted to authority they may, with the addition of some legends as they appeared from other pens, form a pleasant little volume for the writer's and other children, and for such grown people as are not altogether insensible to the poetic side of religion.

The doubtful portions of sacred history have something in them good enough for friendly recognition, and the reader will remember that the very word “legend,” meaning something, though not of authority, that might be read in the churches, carries no small commendation with it. In our days of unbelief it may be considered as unmanly, as childish, to believe whatever science does not undertake to explain; but there is no teaching of science resting on so good a foundation as the lesson taught by our Lord to His contending disciples at Capernaum, where a little child was shown them as a model for those entering on the road to His Father's Kingdom. The child believes; the man doubts—at least the man that is the product of mere human learning.

The writer trusts that his little and big readers will be content to believe many things that they cannot understand, that the angels in heaven do not understand; and believe also that all the books in the world could not contain the wonderful, beautiful and sublime things that are ranged around the life of our Lord. To those who doubt and scoff at the legends that the Church does not prohibit, there is no question but they would doubt and scoff, but in a more guarded way, at the miracles recorded in the Gospel. To these it would be well for them to remember what Cardinal Newman has said about the evidence of miracles generally. We began with a quotation from this great writer; the reader will not do amiss to read it again, and with that we close:

“Of the two I would rather have to maintain that we ought to begin with believing everything that is offered to our acceptance, than that it is our duty to doubt of everything.”

FIRESIDE.

(Concluded.)

LOOKING FORWARD.

National politics are entirely different from the issues of party. The former appertain to every citizen, while the latter are the undisputed property of that poorest of political creations, the mere party man. This distinction is drawn at the start, out of respect for the non-political character of this journal.

The reader will not suppose that the idea of preparing a paper advocating the study of politics, and publishing it in a journal addressed specially to Catholics, originated in a disparaging estimate of their understanding. I could not truly insinuate that Catholics are more derelict than Protestants in the study of Canadian political affairs. Indeed, I feel convinced of the contrary. Anyhow, there is a vast doubt in the matter, the benefits of which may be willingly conceded to our co-religionists. So much by way of preface.

At the late Canadian elections, owing to the previous extension of the elective franchise, thousands for the first time performed the sacred duty of recording a vote. I will not say many went to the polling booth on that occasion, and dropped their fateful billets into the ballot-box, blissfully ignorant of even the proximate consequences of the act. Such an assertion made on suspicion or assumption would be rash; although it appears like one of those cases where the Scotch verdict of “not proven” would fully square with justice. For although the school-master is much abroad in the land, many neither know nor value the privileges which they own, and who, misunderstanding their position in society, are under delusions of every kind with respect to their civic rights and duties.

Yet, politics forms a useful and agreeable study for every one who is or who wishes to become intelligent. It is the open volume of current history to which the events of the