

The Fates of the Apostles

Cynewulf

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Lo! travel-worn, with weary heart, I wrought this lay, made gleaning far and wide how those princely men, radiant and glorious, showed forth heroic might. Twelve were they in number, famed of deed, chosen of God, dear in the days of life. Throughout the earth their praise went forth afar, the might and splendour of the thanes of God, no little glory.

And destiny gave guiding to that holy band where they might magnify the law of the Lord, and make it known to men. Of their number, in the city of Rome, stout of heart, enduring in affliction, Peter and Paul gave up their lives by Nero's crushing guile; and the apostle order was wide revered among all peoples. Likewise before Hegeas in Achaia Andrew staked his life; nor was he shaken before the majesty of any earthly king, but chose immortal life, eternal light, what time he hung upon the cross, enduring in the strife, with the armies tumult round about, after the battle-play. Lo! we have heard men sage of counsel speak of John, recount his nobleness. As I have heard, of all in man's estate he was the dearest unto Christ when the King of glory, Lord of angels, Father of mankind, by the womb of a maid came unto earth; and ever in Ephesus he taught the people. Thence journeying he sought the Way of life, the rapture of heaven, radiant Paradise. Nor was his brother late nor slow unto the journey, but among the Jews, before the throne of Herod, by the print of the sword, he yielded up his life, the spirit with the flesh.

Philip was in the land of the Assaeans, whence he sought eternal life by the pangs of the rood, what time in Gearopolis he was hung upon the cross by a warrior band. Verily full widely known was his destiny that Bartholomew, crafty of war, journeyed unto the men of Inde; and Astrias in Albanum, heathen and blind of heart, bade men behead him for that he would not be subject unto pagan gods, nor worship idols. And he knew the bliss of heaven, eternal weal, fairer than gods of falsehood. Eke Thomas boldly adventured among the men of Inde in other parts; and there was courage brought to many a heart, their souls made strong by reason of his holy word, what time he waked with wondrous craft, by the power of God, the noble brother of the king, before the multitude, so that he arose from death, young and bold in battle. And his name was Gad. Unto that folk he yielded up his life in strife, received a sword-thrust by a heathen hand. There fell the holy man, sore smitten before the hosts, and his soul sought out the radiance of glory, in guerdon of victory.

Lo! we have heard in the holy books that among the men of Aethiopia truth was known, the awful glory of God; and the dawn of day, of bright belief, awoke. The land was purified by Matthew with lofty teachings. Him the cruel king Irtacus, with erring heart, bade slay with weapons. We heard how Jacob in Jerusalem before the priests suffered death by stinging blows of the scourge; for their envious hatred fell that blessed man, stout of heart; and now he hath eternal life with the King of glory as a reward of the battle.

Nor were the other twain slow unto the strife, the play of shields. But Simon and Thaddeus, men bold in war, ever hasting onward sought out the Persian land. And in that place came upon them both an end of their days. Then by weapon-hate these noble men must needs endure affliction; seek out their crown of triumph and true joy, bliss after death, what time their life was severed from the body; and they scorned all fleeting treasure and idle wealth. Thus met their ends the noble twelve, those kindly men; these thanes of glory wear upon their hearts enduring

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honour.

And now I pray that man, whosoever hath joy in the course of this lay, that he entreat that holy band for me in my affliction, for help and peace and succour. How great a need have I of gentle friends upon my way, when I seek out alone my long home, that unknown dwelling—place, and leave behind the body, this bit of earth, to be a spoil and solace unto worms.

Here may a man sage of wisdom, who delighteth in song, learn who wove this lay. Wealth standeth at the end of all. Man hath joy of it on earth, yet may they not abide alway together, dwelling in the world.

Our joy on earth shall vanish; the body's fleeting beauty shall fade even as water glideth away. Hero and evil wight shall seek for strength in the narrow watches of the night. On them resteth heavy Need, the service of the King.

Now mayest thou know who was unknown to man in these words.

May that man who hath pleasure in the course of this lay be mindful thereof, and for me seek aid and comfort. For I shall fare far hence alone unto an alien land, set out upon a journey, I myself know not whither, out of this world. Unknown are those courts, that land and realm. So shall it be to every one of men, save he win grace of God. Wherefore may we more eagerly cry unto the Lord that he may send us blessing in this radiant world, that we may enjoy those dwellings, that home on high, where is most of bliss, where the King of angels granteth to the pure eternal guerdon; and his praise endureth great and glorious forever, and his might abideth eternal, ever—young, through all creation.

Finit.