

“APOLLONIUS TYANEUS AND SIMON MAGUS”

study meeting at the ULT, Sunday 26th February 2017

<http://www.theosophy-ult.org.uk/events>

~ ~ ~

IN the "History of the Christian Religion to the year two hundred," by Charles B. Waite, A.M., announced and reviewed in the *Banner of Light* (Boston), we find portions of the work relating to the great thaumaturgist of the second century A.D.--Apollonius of Tyana, the rival of whom had never appeared in the Roman Empire.

"The time of which this volume takes special cognizance is divided into six periods, during the second of which, A.D. 80 to A.D. 120, is included the 'Age of Miracles,' the history of which will prove of interest to Spiritualists as a means of comparing the manifestations of unseen intelligences in our time with similar events of the days immediately following the introduction of Christianity. Apollonius Tyaneus was the most remarkable character of that period, and witnessed the reign of a dozen Roman emperors. Before his birth, Proteus, an Egyptian god, appeared to his mother and announced that he was to be incarnated in the coming child. Following the directions given her in a dream, she went to a meadow to gather flowers. While there, a flock of swans formed a chorus around her, and, clapping their wings, sung in unison. While they were thus engaged, and the air was being fanned by a gentle zephyr, Apollonius was born."

This is a *legend* which in days of old made of every remarkable character a "son of God" miraculously born of a virgin. And what follows is *history*. "In his youth he was a marvel of mental power and personal beauty, and found his greatest happiness in conversations with the disciples of Plato, Chrysippus and Aristotle. He ate nothing that had life, lived on fruits and the products of the earth; was an enthusiastic admirer and follower of Pythagoras, and as such maintained silence for five years. Wherever he went he reformed religious worship and performed wonderful acts. At feasts he astonished the guests by causing bread, fruits, vegetables and various dainties to appear at his bidding. Statues became animated with life, and bronze figures from their pedestals, took the position and performed the labors of servants. By the exercise of the same power dematerialization occurred; gold and silver vessels, with their contents, disappeared; even the attendants vanished in an instant from sight.

"At Rome, Apollonius was accused of treason. Brought to examination, the accuser came forward, unfolded his roll on which the accusation had been written, and was astounded to find it a perfect blank.

"Meeting a funeral procession he said to the attendants, 'Set down the bier, and I will dry up the tears you are shedding for the maid.' He touched the young woman, uttered a few words, and the dead came to life. Being at Smyrna, a plague raged at Ephesus, and he was called thither. 'The journey must not be delayed,' he said, and had no sooner spoken the words than he was at Ephesus.

"When nearly one hundred years old, he was brought before the Emperor at Rome, accused of being an enchanter. He was taken to prison. While there he was asked when he would be at liberty? 'To-morrow, if it depends on the judge; this instant, if it depends on myself.' Saying this, he drew his leg out of the fetters, and said, 'You see the liberty I enjoy.' He then replaced it in the fetters.

"At the tribunal he was asked: 'Why do men call you a god?'

" 'Because,' said he, 'every man that is good is entitled to the appellation.'

" 'How could you foretell the plague at Ephesus?'

"He replied: 'By living on a lighter diet than other men.'

"His answers to these and other questions by his accusers exhibited such strength that the Emperor was much affected, and declared him acquitted of crime; but said he should detain him in order to hold a private conversation. He replied: 'You can detain my body, but not my soul; and, I will add, not even my body. Having uttered these words he vanished from the tribunal, and that same day met his friends at Puteoli, three days' journey from Rome.

"The writings of Apollonius show him to have been a man of learning, with a consummate knowledge of human nature, imbued with noble sentiments and the principles of a profound philosophy. In an epistle to Valerius he says:

"'There is no death of anything except in appearance; and so, also, there is no birth of anything except in appearance. That which passes over from essence into nature seems to be birth, and that which passes over from nature into essence seems, in like manner, to be death; though nothing really is originated, and nothing ever perishes; but only now comes into sight, and now vanishes. It appears by reason of the density of matter, and disappears by reason of the tenuity of essence; but is always the same, differing only in motion and condition.'

"The highest tribute paid to Apollonius was by the Emperor Titus. The philosopher having written to him, soon after his accession, counselling moderation in his government, Titus replied:

" 'In my own name and in the name of my country I give you thanks, and will be mindful of those things. I have, indeed, taken Jerusalem, but you have captured me.'

"The wonderful things done by Apollonius, thought to be miraculous, the source and producing cause of which Modern Spiritualism clearly reveals, were extensively believed in, in the second century, and hundreds of years subsequent; and by Christians as well as others. Simon Magus was another prominent miracle-worker of the second century, and no one denied his power. Even Christians were forced to admit that he performed miracles. Allusion is made to him in the Acts of the Apostles, viii: 9-10. His fame was world-wide, his followers in every nation, and in Rome a statue was erected in his honor. He had frequent contests with Peter, what we in this day would call miracle-matches in order to determine

which had the greater power. It is stated in 'The Acts of Peter and Paul' that Simon made a brazen serpent to move, stone statues to laugh, and himself to rise in the air; to which is added: 'as a set-off to this, Peter healed the sick by a word, caused the blind to see, &c.' Simon, being brought before Nero, changed his form: suddenly he became a child, then an old man; at other times a young man. 'And Nero, beholding this, supposed him to be the Son of God.'

"In 'Recognitions,' a Petrine work of the early ages, an account is given of a public discussion between Peter and Simon Magus, which is reproduced in this volume.

"Accounts of many other miracle-workers are given, showing most conclusively that the power by which they wrought was not confined to any one or to any number of persons, as the Christian world teaches, but that mediumistic gifts were then, as now, possessed by many. Statements quoted from the writers of the first two centuries of what took place will severely tax the credulity of the most credulous to believe, even in this era of marvels. Many of those accounts may be greatly exaggerated, but it is not reasonable to suppose that they are all sheer fabrications, with not a moiety of truth for their foundation; far less so with the revealments made to men since the advent of Modern Spiritualism. Some idea of the thoroughness with which every subject is dealt with in this volume may be formed when we state that in the index there are two hundred and thirteen references to passages relating to 'Jesus Christ'; from which, also, it may be justly inferred that what is given must be of great value to those seeking information that will enable them to determine whether Jesus was 'Man, Myth, or God.' 'The Origin and History of Christian Doctrines,' also 'The Origin and Establishment of the Authority of the Church of Rome over other Churches,' are fully shown, and much light thrown upon many obscure and disputed questions. In a word, it is impossible for us, without far exceeding the limits prescribed for this article, to render full justice to this very instructive book; but we think enough has been said to convince our readers that it is one of more than ordinary interest, and a desirable acquisition to the literature of this progressive age."¹

Some writers tried to make Apollonius appear a legendary character, while pious Christians will persist in calling him an *impostor*. Were the existence of Jesus of Nazareth as well attested by history and he himself half as known to classical writers as was Apollonius no sceptic could doubt today the very being of such a man as the Son of Mary and Joseph. Apollonius of Tyana was the friend and correspondent of a Roman Empress and several Emperors, while of Jesus no more remained on the pages of history than as if his life had been written on the desert sands. His letter to Agbarus, the prince of Edessa, the authenticity of which is vouchsafed for by Eusebius alone--the Baron Munchausen of the patristic hierarchy--is called in the *Evidences of Christianity* "an attempt at forgery" even by Paley himself, whose robust faith accepts the most incredible stories. Apollonius, then, is a historical personage; while many even of the Apostolic Fathers themselves, placed before the scrutinizing eye of historical criticism, begin to flicker and many of them fade out and disappear like the "will-o'-the-wisp" or the *ignis fatuus*.

Theosophist, June 1881, article by H.P. Blavatsky

¹ Second Edition, 1 vol., 8vo., pp. 455. Chicago: C. V. Waite & Co. Thomas J. Whitehead & Co., agents for New England, 5 Court Square, Room 9, Boston.

Apollonius of Tyana (*Gr.*). A wonderful philosopher born in Cappadocia about the beginning of the first century; an ardent Pythagorean, who studied the Phœnician sciences under Euthydemus; and Pythagorean philosophy and other studies under Euxenus of Heraclea. According to the tenets of this school he remained a vegetarian the whole of his long life, fed only on fruit and herbs, drank no wine, wore vestments made only of plant-fibres, walked barefooted, and let his hair grow to its full length, as all the Initiates before and after him. He was initiated by the priests of the temple of Æsculapius (Asciepios) at Ægae, and learnt many of the “miracles” for healing the sick wrought by the god of medicine. Having prepared himself for a higher initiation by a silence of five years, and by travel, visiting Antioch, Ephesus, Pamphylia and other parts, he journeyed via Babylon to India, all his intimate disciples having abandoned him, as they feared to go to the “land of enchantments”. A casual disciple, Damis, however, whom he met on his way, accompanied him in his travels. At Babylon he was initiated by the Chaldees and Magi, according to Damis, whose narrative was copied by one named Philostratus a hundred years later. After his return from India, he showed himself a true Initiate, in that the pestilences and earthquakes, deaths of kings and other events, which he prophesied duly happened. At Lesbos, the priests of Orpheus, being jealous of him, refused to initiate him into their peculiar mysteries, though they did so several years later. He preached to the people of Athens and other cities the purest and noblest ethics, and the phenomena he produced were as wonderful as they were numerous and well attested. “How is it”, enquires Justin Martyr in dismay—“how is it that the talismans (*telesmata*) of Apollonius have power, for they prevent, as we see, the fury of the waves and the violence of the winds, and the attacks of the wild beasts; and *whilst our Lord’s miracles are preserved by tradition alone*, those of Apollonius are most numerous and actually manifested in present facts?” (Quaest, XXIV.)

But an answer is easily found to this in the fact that after crossing the Hindu Kush, Apollonius had been directed by a king to the *abode of the Sages*, whose abode it may be to this day, by whom he was taught unsurpassed knowledge. His dialogues with the Corinthian Menippus indeed give us the esoteric catechism and disclose (when understood) many an important mystery of nature. Apollonius was the friend, correspondent and guest of kings and queens, and no marvellous or “magic” powers are better attested than his. At the end of his long and wonderful life he opened an esoteric school at Ephesus, and died aged almost one hundred years. (from the Theosophical Glossary)

On SIMON MAGUS

Apollonius had at least a biographer, and a friendly one; his contemporary, Simon the Magician, had only discreditors, controversial antagonists concerned to destroy his influence by decrying his character and his creed. [3rd cent. C.E. eds]

The Early Christian Fathers named him the first heretic, sponsor of a powerful and dangerous Gnosticism, and in an age of bitter rivalry, when charge and counter-charge were the accepted missiles of theological discussion, they excelled themselves to paint in him the first lineaments of Antichrist.

...

His doctrine of universal correlation by correspondence and analogy, seeing Man as the Microcosm embodying the potentialities of the all-inclusive Macrocosm, thus setting salvation in self-knowledge and a certitude of unity with God, points to a life of study and self-examination; while his insistence that the way to so-called magical power must be by the right-hand path of discipline and self-purification scarcely suggests the personality of a necromancer intent upon material satisfactions.

Simon in his own day was noted for his allegorical interpretation of the scriptures.

Recalling this, and having regard for the foregoing facts, may we not ask whether what confronts us here is not a clear case of unimaginative, literal-minded critics blindly or deliberately reading a purely personal meaning into what was put forward as a figurative account of the nature and creation of the world, making for their own ignoble purposes a woman from a familiar symbol, and in a most literal sense prostituting a great and universal truth to be a lie and a calumny?

If Simon indeed claimed godship, then why did his followers thrust out from their communion, as "ignorant," those who addressed his image by his name? Was it not that they consciously approached divinity rather through than in him?

Seize this truth, and even the contradictory charge of Irenaeus that "he allowed himself to be called by whatever name men pleased" glows with a sudden unexpected significance as the word of a teacher who behind the Many had discerned the One, and who must seek, as Simon in fact did, to interpret the scriptures of all nations in accordance with a timeless universal knowledge effective for all men in every age.

[On Gnosticism] Simon has been too often named the founder of Gnosticism – a view no longer tenable. Gnosticism, even in its special Jewish form, dates back some centuries before the Christian era, and even without Simon's Alexandrian additions, its fundamental theosophical likeness is unmistakable.

It is a very ancient tradition we glimpse in the charge against his followers that they gave "barbarous" names to the gods and powers -- a hint, surely, of that untranslatable "sacred dialect" or "mystery language" said to have been taught originally by the gods themselves to the ancient Egyptians!

Take the recorded details of Simon's life and teaching, strip away the evident or probable controversial additions, distortions, and calumnies, and one is left with a teaching of profundity, coherence, and theosophical content, with a man of great learning, pure life, and spiritual understanding.

Whether he was a "magician," or even claimed to be, who can tell? The feats attributed to him clearly do not sort with his teaching, and may well be ignorant or malicious invention, designed to show the greater powers of the apostles.

It is doubtful whether we can even believe the story related in the Acts. If Simon did seek to buy spiritual powers with money, then he deserved all condemnation.

But the problem remains whether a man of such evident spiritual knowledge as his teachings display could, under any circumstances, make such an elementary error. It is certainly sufficiently improbable to make us wonder whether it can be regarded even as an open question.

The Aryan Path² July 1932, pages 468-72

² The Aryan Path was an Anglo-Indian theosophical journal published in Bombay, India, between 1930 and 1960, by Theosophy Company (India). It provided writings in sympathy and agreement with the original writings of H.P. Blavatsky & W.Q. Judge. They are offered here for consideration if not approval so students may judge for themselves.

Its purpose was to form "a nucleus of universal brotherhood of humanity, without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste or color; to study ancient and modern religions, philosophies, and sciences, and to demonstrate the importance of such study". The magazine's first editor was B.P. Wadia...

The articles of this journal have been quoted in discussions about race relations, Indian civilization and English literature. (extracts from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Aryan_Path)