



SIMON MAGUS

a re-evaluation of his philosophy and
teachings

G. R. S. MEAD

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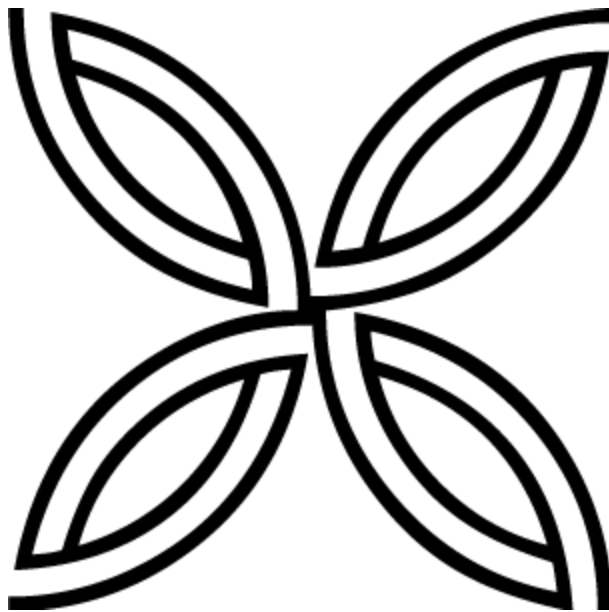
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INTRODUCTION.

Everybody in Christendom has heard of Simon, the magician, and how Peter, the apostle, rebuked him, as told in the narrative of the *Acts of the Apostles*. Many also have heard the legend of how at Rome this wicked sorcerer endeavoured to fly by aid of the demons, and how Peter caused him to fall headlong and thus miserably perish. And so most think that there is an end of the matter, and either cast their mite of pity or contempt at the memory of Simon, or laugh at the whole matter as the invention of superstition or the imagination of religious fanaticism, according as their respective beliefs may be in orthodoxy or materialism. This for the general. Students of theology and church history, on the other hand, have had a more difficult task set them in comparing and arranging the materials they have at their disposal, as found in the patristic writings and legendary records; and various theories have been put forward, not the least astonishing being the supposition that Simon was an alias for Paul, and that the Simon and Peter in the accounts of the fathers and in the narrative of the legends were simply concrete symbols to represent the two sides of the Pauline and Petrine controversies.

The first reason why I have ventured on this present enquiry is that Simon Magus is invariably mentioned by the heresiologists as the founder of the first heresy of the commonly-accepted Christian era, and is believed by them to have been the originator of those systems of religio-philosophy and theosophy which are now somewhat inaccurately classed together under the heading of

Gnosticism. And though this assumption of the patristic heresiologists is entirely incorrect, as may be proved from their own works, it is nevertheless true that Simonianism is the first system that, as far as our present records go, came into conflict with what has been regarded as the orthodox stream of Christianity. A second reason is that I believe that Simon has been grossly misrepresented, and entirely misunderstood, by his orthodox opponents, whoever they were, in the first place, and also, in the second place, by those who have ignorantly and without enquiry copied from them. But my chief reason is that the present revival of theosophical enquiry throws a flood of light on Simon's teachings, whenever we can get anything approaching a first-hand statement of them, and shows that it was identical in its fundamentals with the Esoteric Philosophy of all the great religions of the world.

In this enquiry, I shall have to be slightly wearisome to some of my readers, for instead of giving a selection or even a paraphrase of the notices on Simon which we have from authenticated patristic sources, I shall furnish verbatim translations, and present a digest only of the unauthenticated legends. The growth of the Simonian legend must unfold itself before the reader in its native form as it comes from the pens of those who have constructed it. Repetitions will, therefore, be unavoidable in the marshalling of authorities, but they will be shown to be not without interest in the subsequent treatment of the subject, and at any rate we shall at least be on the sure ground of having before us all that has been said on the matter by the Church fathers. Having cited these authorities, I shall attempt to submit them to a critical examination, and so eliminate all accretions, hearsay and controversial opinions, and thus sift out what reliable residue is possible. Finally, my task will be to show that Simon taught a system of Theosophy, which instead of deserving our condemnation should rather excite our

admiration, and that, instead of being a common impostor and impious perverter of public morality, his method was in many respects of the same nature as the methods of the theosophical movement of to-day, and deserves the study and consideration of all students of Theosophy.

This essay will, therefore, be divided into the following parts:

1. — Sources of Information.
2. — A Review of Authorities.
3. — The Theosophy of Simon.

Preface

The history of western magic started about 4000 years ago. And since then it has been adding something to western magic. Originally, the Latin word magus nominated the followers of the spiritualist-priest class, and later originated to elect 'clairvoyant, sorcerer' and in a judgmental sense also 'magician, trickster'. Thus, the initial meaning of the word 'magic' was the wisdoms of the Magi, that is the abilities of attaining supernatural powers and energy, while later it became practical critically to deceitful wizardry. The etymological descriptions specify three significant features in the expansion of the notion 'magic': 1) Magic as a discipline of celestial natural forces and in the course of formation 2) Magic as the exercise of such facts in divinations, visions and illusion 3) Fraudulent witchery. The latter belief played a significant part in the Christian demonization process. The growth of the western notion 'magic' directed to extensive assumptions in the demonological and astrophysical argument of the Neoplatonists. Their tactic was grounded on the philosophy of a hierarchically ordered outer space, where conferring to Plotinus (C205-C270 AD) a noetic ingredient was shaped as the outcome of eternal and countless radiation built on the ultimate opinion; this in its chance contributed to the rise of psychic constituent, which formed the basis of the factual world. Furthermore, these diverse phases of release came to be measured as convinced forces, which underneath the impact of innocent and evil views during late ancient times were embodied as humans. The hierarchical cosmos of Iamblichus simply demonstrates the legitimacy of this process. In his work, the Neoplatonic cosmology has initiated a channel through the syncretism distinctive of the late antiquity and in the essence of Greco-

Oriental dualism. Superior productions are taken closer to inferior ones by various midway creatures. The higher the site of the mediators, the further they bear a resemblance to gods and whizzes; the minor they are, the nearer they stand to the psychic-spiritual part. The aforementioned group of intermediaries has been settled in order of series on the origin of cosmic gravity. Proclus (c410–485 AD) has described the system of magic origin conversed above in better aspect: in the hierarchical shackles of cosmic rudiments the power and nature of a firm star god disturbs everything mediocre, and with growing distance the impact slowly becomes weaker. The Humanists approached the Platonic notions from the outlook of the bequest of late antiquity, and were thus first familiarized to the Neoplatonic form of the doctrine. And since Ficino's work has been inscribed in the spirit of emanation theory, and the author has been persuaded of the existence of the higher and lower spheres of magic and powers defined in Picatrix, he claims that planets and cosmic movements have much to do with power and magic spirit. Today's occult marketplace also offers, in addition to books, multifarious paraphernalia for practicing magic: amulets, talismans, pendulums and magic rods. Though added with modern essentials and pseudoscientific advices to give some weight to the fundamentals, they are nothing but the leftovers of the western ethnicities of magic.

PART I.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

Our sources of information fall under three heads: I. The Simon of the *New Testament* ; II. The Simon of the Fathers; III. The Simon of the Legends.

I.— *The Simon of the New Testament.*

Acts (viii. 9-24); author and date unknown; commonly supposed to be "by the author of the third gospel, traditionally known as Luke"; ^[1]not quoted prior to A.D. 177; ^[2]earliest MS. not older than the sixth century, though some contend for the third.

II.— *The Simon of the Fathers.*

i. Justinus Martyr (*Apologia* , I. 26, 56; *Apologia* , II. 15; *Dialogus cum Tryphone* , 120); probable date of First Apology A.D. 141; neither the date of the birth nor death of Justin is known; MS. fourteenth century.

ii. Irenæus (*Contra Hæreses* , I. xxiii. 1-4); chief literary activity last decennium of the second century; MSS. probably sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries; date of birth and death unknown, for the former any time from A.D. 97-147 suggested, for latter 202-3.

iii. Clemens Alexandrinus (*Stromateis* , ii. 11; vii. 17); greatest literary activity A.D. 190-203; born 150-160, date of death unknown; oldest MS. eleventh century.

iv. Tertullianus (*De Præscriptionibus adversus Hæreticos* ,

46, generally attributed to a Pseudo-Tertullian); c. A.D. 199; (*De Anima* , 34, 36); c. A.D. 208-9; born 150-160, died 220-240.

v. [Hippolytus (?)] (*Philosophumena* , vi. 7-20); date unknown, probably last decade of second to third of third century; author unknown and only conjecturally Hippolytus; MS. fourteenth century.

vi. Origenes (*Contra Celsum* , i. 57; v. 62; vi. 11); born A.D. 185-6, died 254-5; MS. fourteenth century.

vii. Philastrius (*De Hæresibus*); date of birth unknown, died probably A.D. 387.

viii. Epiphanius (*Contra Hæreses* , ii. 1-6); born A.D. 310-20, died 404; MS. eleventh century.

ix. Hieronymus (*Commentarium in Evangelicum Matthæi* , IV. xxiv. 5); written A.D. 387.

x. Theodoretus (*Hereticarum Fabularum Compendium* , i. 1); born towards the end of the fourth century, died A.D. 453-58; MS. eleventh century.

III.— *The Simon of the Legends.*

A. The so-called Clementine literature.

i. *Recognitiones* , 2. *Homiliæ* , of which the Greek originals are lost, and the Latin translation of Rufinus (born c.A.D. 345, died 410) alone remains to us. The originals are placed by conjecture somewhere about the beginning of the third century; MS. eleventh century.

B. A mediæval account; (*Constitutiones Sanctorum Apostolorum* , VI. vii, viii, xvi); these were never heard of prior to 1546, when a Venetian, Carolus Capellus, printed an epitomized translation of them from an MS. found in Crete. They are hopelessly apocryphal.

I.— *The Simon of the New Testament.*

Acts (viii. 9-24). Text: *The Greek Testament* (with the readings adopted by the revisers of the authorized version); Oxford, 1881.

Now a certain fellow by name Simon had been previously in the city practising magic and driving the people of Samaria out of their wits, saying that he was some great one; to whom all from small to great gave heed, saying: "This man is the Power of God which is called Great." And they gave heed to him, owing to his having driven them out of their wits for a long time by his magic arts. But when they believed on Philip preaching about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, they began to be baptized, both men and women. And Simon himself also believed, and after being baptized remained constantly with Philip; and was driven out of *his* wits on seeing the signs and great wonders ^[3]that took place.

And the apostles in Jerusalem hearing that Samaria had received the Word of God, sent Peter and John to them. And they went down and prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet it had not fallen upon any of them, but they had only been baptized unto the Name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that the Holy Spirit was given by the laying on of the hands of the apostles, he offered them money, saying: "Give unto me also this power, in order that on whomsoever I lay my hands he may receive the Holy Spirit."

But Peter said unto him: "Thy silver perish with thee, in that thou didst think that the gift of God is possessed with money. There is not for thee part or lot in this Word, for thy heart is not right before God. Therefore turn from this evil of thine, and pray the Lord, if by chance the thought of thy heart shall be forgiven thee. For I see that thou art in the