



Simon Magus

G. R. S. Mead

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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.

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