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A SPIRITUALIST OF NERO'S DAY.

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THE life of Apollonius of Tyana, a contemporary of St. Paul, is told by Philostratus, a Regius professor in the university of Athens. The professor received from his imperial patroness, the Syrian wife of Severus, certain documents said to have been compiled by one Damis, a companion of Apollonius, who had apparently both the gifts and failings of Dr. Johnson's Boswell. The work is a curious blend of fact and fiction. There is no doubt that the man lived, and taught in the reigns of Nero and Domitian. There is a great deal of amusing exaggeration as well of interesting adventure and speculation in the pages of Philostratus which makes his book pleasant reading. Apollonius comes into personal contact with many important personages—Nero, Nerva, Vespasian, Domitian, Emperors, and the Prætorian prefects, Tigellinus and Aelianus, and the consul Telesinus—and valuable sidelights are thrown not only upon their characters and doings, but also upon the history and law of the latter half of the first century. The Church Fathers Origen, Chrysostom, Augustine and others, as well as Lucian the critic of the second century, do not speak very highly of Apollonius. Chrysostom, in fact, says plainly that all the miraculous works attributed to him are "lies and imagination." And Lucian called him "The Egregious one with his mummery." He happened to be made a rallying symbol in the struggle between the Empire and the Church. It became the fashion for authors of the ruling class to write books in his praise in prose and poetry. Hierocles, a proconsul of Bithynia, an instigator of Diocletian's persecution about A.D. 303, made one of the final attacks on Christianity in his "True words against the Christians," in which he instituted a comparison between the Gospel miracles and those of Apollonius. Eusebius, the Church historian, answered him in a tract in which he criticized Philostratus as "having culture but not regard for truth," and, in effect, says that he had spoiled the life of Apollonius, who probably was a philosopher, but was converted by his biographer into a mountebank. This did not, however, annihilate the sage, for Eunapius, an enemy of Christianity, said Philostratus' *Life* should be called "A God's visit to men." We shall now take up and read this book thus diversely described.

The interesting point to begin at is when the sage is approaching Rome. He had been all over the East, India, Egypt, Asia, Greece. He had taught in Athens; he had visited Crete. In fact, he had been a globe-trotter on no mean scale. He declared that his purpose was to improve himself and his hearers in science, and to expose the ignorance of the hierophant. He was a philosopher of the Pythagorean school, but many of his feats remind one of

spiritualism. This modern touch may interest some. Well in the year A.D. 66 he is on his way to Rome where Nero was lording it in no uncertain manner, Nero, who our author says with a quiet humour, "had nothing in common with philosophy." At Aricia he fell in with another philosopher Philolaus, who warned him not to visit the city as philosophy was taboo there. "And here you are," he said, "with a band of philosophers in your train, advancing in a barefaced manner, and you are not aware that Nero has men posted at the gates to arrest you all before you enter this town." A discussion on Nero's methods followed. "The emperor fights as a gladiator and kills his man too; he also is a charioteer," said the other. "Oh," said the sage, "it would be pleasant to see Nero turning into the plaything of man, whereas Plato has said that man was the plaything of the gods." "You would pay dearly for that sight," retorted the other, "if you should be arrested and put to death. Why, Nero would eat you raw."

The result of the discussion was that some of the sage's followers considered that discretion was the better part of valour, and declined to proceed. The remaining eight the sage entertained with a description of Nero as—"the beast that is called a tyrant," and with the cutting remark, "lions, panthers and other wild beasts do not devour their mothers like Nero"—a very dangerous remark to make, if he did make it. But this is in the narrative said to be supplied by Damis, the Boswell of Apollonius.

Encouraged by this and other remarks, the gallant band advanced to the gate of the city, where the tall guardsmen took note of their strange dress and appearance, but evidently considering them poor specimens let them pass. So having made their entrance into the great city, they sought rest and refreshment in a tavern not far from the gates. There they were pestered by a tipsy stroller who persisted in singing Nero's songs, and appeared to be authorized to take note of all who would not applause or pay. He evidently took the measure of the new-comers for he sang for their special benefit airs from the various dramas in which Nero acted, giving them Nero's turns and trills, but he met with no response. But before he left them, he made himself somewhat unpleasant, vilifying them as "enemies of the divine voice," and "guilty of sacrilege against Nero." The result of the rascal's interference was that Apollonius received a summons to appear before Telesinus the consul, who questioned him about his science and religion, and deeming his answers satisfactory, or himself harmless, gave him permission to teach in the temples.

Shortly afterwards, Demetrius the cynic arrived in Rome, and as he happened to think well of Apollonius, and not so well of Nero, and gave utterance to his thoughts, suspicion fell upon Apollonius. The climax came when Nero opened the new baths and the cynic took the opportunity of making a stump oration against the bathers, whom he described, as they were,—a putrid crowd. Nero, however, took no notice, for he was happily engaged singing in a tavern, naked to the waist, and in excellent voice.

Tigellinus, on the other hand, the prætorian prefect, who could not be described quite as Nero's "angel," expelled the eloquent one from Rome for having "blown up the baths with his tongue," and gave orders to shadow Apollonius. This was done in no half-hearted manner. "For all the eyes the government sees with were turned upon him. His discourses, and his silences, his sitting and his walking, whether he sacrificed or did not. All was reported." Philosophers were indeed living "dangerously," as the writer remarks. However, one thing was in this philosopher's favour. Tigellinus, who evidently had a bad conscience, when he heard of some of the man's performances, became nervous, and would not indict him openly, through fear of something happening to himself. And Telesinus, the consul, who seems to have been interested in philosophy, took pleasure in discussing various subjects with him. However, Tigellinus's tactics were eventually rewarded, for one of his secret police came to him one day with the information that the sage had said, "pardon the gods for finding amusement in buffoons"—a palpable hit at Nero. So he despatched soldiers to make the arrest, and informed the sage that he would be charged with impiety against Nero. The public prosecutor was briefed against him, and he brandished his brief, as a sword, over the head of the accused for some time. But then as he proceeded to unroll it, the words of the indictment had vanished from the paper! Nervous as Tigellinus was before, that finished him. So he ordered the sage to be conveyed to his own private court, where the gravest charges were tried in secrecy, and questioned him especially about his power over spirits.

In the course of conversation the prefect, who was becoming more and more impressed by the confident assurance of the sage, demanded, "with regard to the spirits and apparitions of ghosts, how do you detect them?" To this the sage returned the bold and adroit answer, "In the very same way that I detect bloodstained and impious men." This answer evidently went home, for Tigellinus, chief instructor of crimes to Nero, said, "You may go, you have only to find securities for your appearance." The other said, "Who will go bail for the body, which none shall imprison?" "Go," said the Prefect, unwilling to fight with the gods, "my power is unable to control you." So the sage withdrew free. He had owed his victory partly to the fact that he was a good-living man, and was contending with one possessed by an evil conscience.

But when Nero was leaving for Greece in the autumn of A.D. 66, he issued an order forbidding anyone to teach philosophy in Rome, simply because he knew the philosophers, chiefly the Stoics, were hostile to his rule, and had been implicated in Piso's rebellion of the previous year. Accordingly, Apollonius had to seek fresh fields for his "science," and elected to visit Spain, because he heard the people of that country favoured philosophy and religion. So he and his followers spent some time in Gades, the most voluptuous city in Spain. There news of Nero's victories with song and chariot

at Olympia reached him. All through, however, he is credited with the gift of second sight. Some people were discussing Nero's antics, and one said, "I wonder what he is doing now," and the sage answered, "He is being crowned for his victories." The sage hated Nero, and busied himself in enlisting people in the cause of Vindex, who was preparing to rise against the absent tyrant. He was also devoted both to Nerva and Vespasian. He won the esteem of Vespasian, who appears to have been devoted to him, and listened to a discourse from him on self-control. The sage had spoken up for Vespasian when some philosophers were discussing him unfavourably, and Euphrates, the man who afterwards informed against Apollonius, was enlarging upon his ambition.

It was in Domitian's reign that the sage found himself in trouble, but he showed the same undaunted spirit. Domitian was not warmly disposed to philosophers, for they were busily engaged in turning the young men against him. Ever since the days of Socrates the philosophers appealed to the youth, whom they were charged by their enemies with corrupting. Apollonius was bolder than others. He made no attempt to conceal his feelings. And the story of his relations with Domitian throws a light upon the legal procedure in vogue in those days, and the spiritualistic power attributed to the sage. At this time Apollonius was in Ephesus inciting the youth and the officials to rise, and quoting such classic examples as the assassination of the tyrant Hipparchus by Harmodius and Aristogiton in Athens, and was also intriguing with friends in Rome in the interests of Nerva, who did in time don the purple and prove a wise ruler. But the sage was too wary a bird to put anything on paper. He denounced epistolary communications as unsafe, since many had been betrayed by their slaves, friends and even wives. "In those days," the writer says, "no house could keep a secret." It was all done by word of mouth. At last, however, the spies were rewarded. Euphrates hovered round him relentlessly, and one day observed him as he stood before a statue of Domitian, and heard, or said he heard, him say—"Thou fool, it is little thou knowest of the fates or necessity. The man that is destined to succeed thee, though thou put him to death, will come to life." Euphrates had much joy in reporting this terrible sentence to the tyrant, who at once summoned the delinquent to his presence to answer for his secret dealings with his foes, thinking that he could condemn and execute him with a semblance of legality. The governor of Asia was ordered by letter to have the sage arrested and conveyed to Rome for trial. But before the summons could reach him, the sage was already on his way to Rome. He had foreseen by his gift what was coming. So he sailed at once for Corinth and thence to Italy, and in Cicero's historic villa of Cumamum had a heart-to-heart talk with Demetrius, another philosopher, who had managed to escape from Rome, and now urged Apollonius to retire, telling him that Domitian would implicate him in his charges against Nerva. He also informed him that the indictment against him contained among other charges,

that he had sacrificed a boy, and that he was worshipped. But the sage would not listen to the other as he pointed out that this would be a squalid fiasco, not a philosopher's martyrdom, as there would be only the semblance of a trial. The sage replied that there were two kinds of tyrants, the one that kills without a trial, and the other who apparently uses legal forms. The latter he considered the more dangerous, as he deprived his victims of public sympathy. This throws a light on the legal methods of Nero and Domitian.

The sage decided that he was bound to face his trial in Rome rather than allow his associates to fall under suspicion and be ruined. He said, "If I play false to my friends, conscience will convict me." Accordingly he sailed for Ostia with his friend Damis. Arrived in Rome, he waited the summons of the prefect Aelianus, who exerted his influence on his behalf all through the anxious time that followed. He said that many years before the sage had foretold to him his present position, which he now regarded, however, as a vexation. Even before the sage arrived, he had sought to turn Domitian from his determination to execute him. His method was ridicule. "The philosophers were only 'gas-bags.' They are fed-up with life and are set on death. They provoke the magistrates to use the sword. Nero knew this. So he would not oblige Demetrius or Musonius by putting them to death." In this way, the Prefect tried to fill Domitian with an easy contempt for Apollonius, and when he heard the sage was in Rome, summoned him to his office. The sage said in the interview that he was thinking of running away to a place, where men were more godloving, where there were no legal processes, but dreaded the charge of being a "traitor," if he ran away from his defence. And when in the preliminary investigation of the charges against him, which was held in the prefect's court, the prosecutor charged the sage with being a sorcerer and a magician, the latter said, "If I am a magician, how am I on my trial; and if I am on my trial, how am I a magician?" which was a poser. Aelianus bid the sage then reserve his defence for the imperial court, and saying that he wished to examine the accused privately, withdrew to his private office where he told the sage that he really wished to save him because of what he had done for him many years before. "The emperor," he said, "wishes to condemn you, but fears to do it on a false charge. He is really aiming through you at men of the highest rank. And I must pretend to be against you, otherwise I too shall be ruined." A good deal of dramatic element is introduced into these scenes. Aelianus was an actor of parts. After telling the sage to cheer up, he summoned his officers and said in angry tones—"I order you to detain this man until the emperor has been informed of his arrival and statement." Then he withdrew to attend to other matters, and the officer, evidently a wag, entered into talk with the sage: "I have prepared a fine defence for you," he said, and offered there and then to oblige the philosopher by cutting off his head. "If your head is cut off, you are not a magician, but if my arm is unable to lift

my sword, you are." As they were discussing this suggestion, the order came that the sage should be lodged in the Free Prison until the emperor should have an interview with him. There he was rejoined by Damis, who when he heard all that had passed knelt down, saying—" Some god is holding his hand over us." " Nonsense," cried Apollonius, " science dominates the world ; the man we have come to is suffering from swelled-head."

In this prison they met interesting people as Pickwick did in the Fleet. One man was in prison because his riches brought him under suspicion. Another, because when governor of Tarentum, he had omitted in the public prayers to describe Domitian as Athena's son. Another, because he lived in a lonely isle, and was suspected of having committed some awful crime. The sage proceeded to comfort these and the others with the philosophic reflections, that the soul was in prison in the body, and that those who live in palaces are closer prisoners than those they imprison.

The next day, he noticed a stranger deeply interested in his conversation, who said he was in grave peril, but learning that he was a spy sent to observe and record, he changed his line of talk, and discoursed about his travels, giving the spy to understand that if he wished to say anything against the emperor he would not inform against him. Aelianus, in the meantime, managed to send him timely warning to prepare for the interview, which the sage did not appear, however, to dread. When a clerk of the imperial court arrived with the summons, the other said, " Let us be off, then." He was escorted to the palace by four Prætorian guardsmen, and was the observed of all observers because of his strange appearance and dress. As they approached the palace, and saw the people passing in and out, some saluting, others saluted, he remarked to Damis, as Dr. Johnson might have to Boswell, " This is like the public baths, those inside are in a hurry to pass out, and those outside are struggling to pass in, just like the washed and the unwashed." Damis evidently thought the joke rather frigid, for he is rallied on his pale cheeks by the sage, who takes the opportunity of expressing his readiness for death. The sage is then ushered into the presence by Aelianus. Damis was not admitted. Indeed, he had no desire to enter. Now the entertainment begins. The " Lion," as the sage described him, was discovered crowned with a wreath of olives in the court of Adonis, which resembled a modern conservatory. There he had just finished a sacrifice to his " mother " Athena. The " Lion," startled by the peculiar appearance of the sage, shouted, " Aelianus, what devil have you brought to me ? " After some insulting questions and equally cool replies, Domitian demanded of the sage how he could clear himself of complicity with Nerva's designs. The sage, taken off his guard, launched into an eulogy of Nerva, and his friends. Domitian retorted that they were " abominable scoundrels," and that the sage was " a magician, an impudent impostor, and money-grabber." The other replied that it was disgraceful for a man to sit to judge a case he had already prejudged. This remark did

not help matters. Domitian was not accustomed to get such replies. In answer to his threat of bonds, the sage answered, "If I am a magician, how will you bind me? and if you bind me, how am I a magician?" "You shall not escape me," cried the tyrant, "unless you turn into water or a beast or a tree." "I shall submit to anything you can do to my body," replied the sage, "until I can make a defence for those men." "And who is it," asked the other, "that will make a defence for you?" "Time and the judgment of good men," was the answer.

Domitian evidently thought the sage wanted a cooling, for he at once transferred him to the prison, where the lowest criminals were kept, and had his beard cut and his legs put in chains. After a couple of days, a stranger arrived in the prison, who said he had had to give a big tip to the jailer, and had come to advise him how to regain his liberty. But he got nothing out of the sage, who received his remarks in stony silence. Seeing that he could make nothing of him, he expressed his amazement at seeing the sage's hair cut and his legs in chains, and wondered what it felt like. But he withdrew when he failed to provoke the man. Aelianus, in the meanwhile, had succeeded in making Domitian see his injustice, and he consented to allow the sage to be removed to the Free Prison, and to be notified that the trial would take place in four days. The sage was, accordingly, brought back to his first prison, where he was welcomed by his former friends, who never expected to see him again. This meeting is described with real feeling. Like children around their father, these poor fellows crowded round the sage welcoming him, and saying how much he had helped them by his words of counsel, and he ceased not giving them good advice. One young fellow told him when there that death would be a release for him from dishonour. The boy was a slave, but maintained that he was master of his own body. This throws a sidelight on the sufferings of that age.

We now pass into the law court where the sage has to make his defence. We may be sure that the learning and accuracy of Philostratus are a guarantee for the correct setting of this scene. It is sunrise, and the favoured ones are taking their seats. The Emperor is said to be too busy with the case to take his meal. He shows his temper as he turns over the brief in anger and perplexity. Apollonius, on the other hand, looked more like a man going to deliver a lecture, than one about to be tried for his life. "Against whom am I to plead?" he demanded of the clerk. "Against your accuser, and the Emperor will give the sentence," was the reply. "How much water will you require for your speech?" (a reference to the clepsydra used in courts to measure time) asked the clerk. "All the water in the Tiber, if justice is to be done," retorted the other. And then, as another usher detained them in front of the court saying, "You must strip before entering," he exclaimed, "Are we going to a bath or to a trial?" The other stiffly answered, "The order does not refer to clothing, but you must not bring any amulet, or book, or tablet into the Emperor's court." "What,"

cried the sage with ready wit, "not even a rod for his foolish advisers?" "By the Emperor's majesty," shouted the accuser, who overheard, "the sorcerer threatens me with stripes."

Inside, the court was arranged as for a public oration. The Emperor was seated as judge on the tribunal, and many of the aristocracy were there, for Domitian wished to have as many people as possible present at the conviction of the sage for his complicity in the plots of Nerva. When Apollonius was conducted to his place in the court the prosecuting counsel ordered him to look towards "the God of all mankind," meaning Domitian, whereupon the sage promptly threw up his eyes to the roof, towards the sun! The other, then addressing the judge, requested him not to give the defendant all the time he could claim, for he would weary them to death if he did. "I hold this brief" (little book), he said, "which contains the charges against him, and order him to reply to them seriatim." The accuser, having obtained the judge's consent, put the four leading questions to the sage, who answered them calmly, and then confused his adversary by demanding evidence for his statements. At this there was applause, and the Emperor said, "I acquit you of the charges, but you must wait for a private interview." "No," said the sage, "you shall shackle neither my body nor my soul." And after a few more words, "you shall not kill me, for that is not my fate," *he vanished from the court!*

Philostratus says this is the account he had found of the trial and that the sage had written an elaborate apology but was not allowed to deliver it. In it he attacked pseudo-science and sorcery as a profession of money-grabbers. As to the charge of being worshipped, he did not deny it, but said man had communications with God, that our virtues came from the Godward-side of us, and those who partook of them are near to the Gods and Godlike. He declared his belief in a universal Creator, whose goodness made Him think of creating man. In the course of his defence he did not plead an alibi, but admitted that he was in Rome at the time. "What, informer, was I doing that night? If you should ask me what you were doing I should say—preparing trials and accusations for honest men, to destroy the innocent and win the Emperor's approval by falsehood, to advance yourself, to disgrace him."

Apollonius next appears to his friends in Puteoli, where he had told Damis, who was not admitted to the court, to meet him. There he proved himself alive by permitting them to touch his body, saying, "If I elude you, I am a ghost." They could no longer disbelieve, but rose up and embraced him, and questioned him about his defence. "I have made my defence," he said, "and we are the winners." Damis had told the other that when he saw Apollonius removing his legs from the shackles in prison, he knew he was *divine*. And now to this *divine person*, who had in this miraculous manner transferred his body from the imperial court in Rome to a villa by the sea in Puteoli, he says—"Your name will be proscribed, you will be cut off from every avenue of escape. He will have you arrested." And while poor Damis

was imagining every moment that he heard the horsemen in pursuit of the "divine" person, that person was taking it calmly. "I shall sail to Greece," he said. "A dangerous destination," said the other, "everything is known there, you could not hide from him even in the dark." "I am not afraid of that," said the sage, "but do you know of a ship sailing to Sicily?" "Yes," said Damis, "we are not lodging by the sea for nothing. The 'bosun' is near the door, and they are getting ready the ship, as I understand from the shouts of the men and the rattling of the chains." "Let us aboard then and sail for Sicily and the Peloponnesus." They succeeded in reaching Greece eventually. Thence they passed to Ephesus where a curious coincidence is recorded by Dio Cassius, which suggests that Apollonius had remarkable powers of telepathy. He was standing on a stone, when he seemed to see Stephanus strike Domitian with his dagger, and the sage was heard shouting, "Well done, Stephanus, strike the dirty tyrant." This was the first intimation the people in that district had of the murder of Domitian (Sept. 18, A.D. 96). But the greatest "miracle" of all is his "Ascension." The Cretans claim that he ascended from Crete. He was staying there, more respected than ever in his old age, and had entered into the temple of Dictynna (Artemis) at Cydonia, when suddenly the doors closed behind him and girlish voices were heard singing, "Leave the earth, go to heaven, pass up from the earth." This is told with a deal of claptrap about temple guardians, who tried to bind him as a robber and sorcerer, and fierce dogs, who would not bark at him.

To return to Domitian, what was the effect upon him of that marvellous disappearance, that feat of body-transference? He was so bewildered that he could not attend to the details of the next case and actually forgot the names!

Apollonius had certain gifts. He claimed like modern spiritualists, that he could hold converse with the dead. He called up the spirit of Achilles and put certain questions to him about the Trojan War, and said that the god Proteus had appeared to his mother before his birth. Philostratus denied that he was a sorcerer, as his powers lay not in obstructing but in foreseeing the course of destiny. Apollonius was a vegetarian and wore flax, not wool. He is not to be confused with Peregrinus Proteus who was a clever charlatan, and immolated himself at the Olympian games in A.D. 165. Lucian tells his story in his *de morte Peregrini*. But Apollonius was a more serious person; and if we cannot believe a great deal that was said of him, there is yet a great deal to be admired and more to interest in this account of one who would now be called a spiritualist, but was then described as a "magician." That was the usual name in those days for spiritualists. Nero tried to recall the spirit of his murdered mother and appease her "by *magicians*," Suetonius,[1] the historian, tells us. But the word should be rendered "spiritualists."

[1] Suetonius. *Nero*. c. 34: "facto per Magos sacro evocare Manes et exorare temptavit."