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so divine a Spirit. For wherever self-sufficiency is delineated upon a large scale, it verges upon an unnatural and arid isolation from the passions that sway human life; with the result that the subject appears to be, like one of Leibnitz's monads, "windowless."

JAMES MOFFATT.

(To be continued.)

RECENT NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM.

III.

SECOND CENTURY RIVALS OF THE EVANGELIC JESUS.

WHEN it is alleged that the Jesus of the evangelic narratives is not the Jesus of history, but an ideal figure created partly by the Church's faith which all unconsciously surrounded the Lord with an halo of glory, and partly by the theological processes of a later generation, the question arises: *Is it credible that that age should have imagined such a character as is depicted by the evangelic narratives? Was it capable of conceiving so transcendent an ideal?* This is the inquiry to which we shall now address ourselves, and it so happens there is material at hand for a singularly satisfactory and instructive solution.

By the middle of the second century the Faith had won its way to recognition, and had proved to the intellectual world that it was not a folly to be laughed at, but a force to be reckoned with. Once it engaged the attention of lettered men, they dealt with it after two methods. One was argument, and the principal disputant was the philosopher Celsus, whose clever attack in the *True Word* evoked Origen's masterly reply. The other method was more subtle and elusive. Christianity was not directly assailed, but an attempt was made to undermine it by proving that it was not so wondrous or unique a thing as it professed to

be, and that all the good it contained, and even more, might be found in Paganism. By a true instinct it was perceived that Christ is all in all to Christianity, and its opponents sought to compass its destruction by robbing Him of His glory. Unable, perhaps unwilling, to deny His greatness and goodness, they painted pictures of other teachers of their own, greater and better, according to their standards, than He, and set those rivals of Jesus before the world, never so much as mentioning His name, but leaving the obvious comparison to present itself and suggest the inference they intended. They said nothing, but they meant: "See! here is one nobler and wiser and more wonderful than your Jesus."

At least two such attempts were made to discredit Jesus, and very significant they are in relation to the question of the historicity of the evangelic narratives. 1. The author of the first was Lucian, that brilliant *littérateur*, the last of the great Greek writers. He was born at Samosata on the Euphrates during the reign of Trajan (98–117 A.D.), and, according to the Byzantine lexicographer Suidas, followed the law for a time at Syrian Antioch, but, failing in this profession, abandoned it and devoted himself to literature. It is customary to speak of Lucian as "the Voltaire of the second century," but such a characterization is much less than just. It is true indeed that he plied the religion of his day with his merciless artillery of satire and ridicule, and made cruel sport of the ancient legends of the gods and goddesses; but then the religion of that degenerate period was no better than a mass of incredible, contemptible, and often immoral superstitions, and it was no impiety to rid the world of the baleful incubus. And, moreover, while he did his utmost against Christianity, which he imperfectly comprehended and regarded as merely the latest phase of that ancient and ever-changing superstition, this at least should be imputed to his credit, that he never blasphemed

the Faith; and when he speaks of Jesus, it is in a tone which is wellnigh reverential. "That great man," he says in one place, "they still revere, who was crucified in Palestine, because He introduced this new mystery into life"; and again: "Their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brethren when once they forsake and deny the Greek gods and worship their wise man, him who was crucified, and live according to his laws."

Such is the spirit in which Lucian essayed to set up a rival to Jesus by way of demonstrating to the world that there was nothing unique or transcendent in Christianity. He paints the picture of a philosopher named Demonax, whom he professes to have known, and who may have been a real personage, though unquestionably he has been idealized by his biographer for controversial ends. The reason for telling the story of his life was "that he might be had in remembrance by the best folk, and that young men of the nobler sort who had an eye to philosophy might be able not merely by the ancient examples to attune themselves, but also from our own age to set a standard before them and emulate that great man, who proved himself better than any other philosopher I know."[1] It is not difficult to perceive here, reading between the lines, that Lucian's purpose was to set forth a rival to one who was held in general reverence; nor is it open to reasonable question that it was Jesus whom he had in his eye. Such distant yet unmistakable allusiveness was just in Lucian's manner; and to one who remembers his veiled satires in the *True History* on the story of Jonah and the Apocalyptic description of the New Jerusalem,[2] the reference in this instance must appear indubitably plain.

It must be allowed that the character which Lucian

[1] *Dem. Vit.*, § 2.

[2] i. §§ 30 sqq.; ii. §§ 11 sqq.; cf. article "Unto the Greeks Foolishness," by the present writer, in EXPOSITOR, October, 1900.

depicts is exceedingly attractive. Demonax was a native of Cyprus, and, disdaining worldly advantages, he devoted himself early to the study of philosophy. He attached himself to no school, neither did he originate a philosophy, but selected from the various systems whatever he deemed good. He was an eclectic, and was chiefly indebted to two masters, being a Socratic without the "irony" of Socrates and emulating Diogenes without Diogenes' affectation of humility.[1] His discourses were "full of Attic grace,"[2] and he always "acted and spoke by the aid of the Graces and Aphrodite, so that, as the comedy has it, 'persuasion sate upon his lips.'"[3] He had two outstanding characteristics. One was his pleasant humour, and the collection of his *bons mots* which Lucian gives is one of the most entertaining passages in ancient literature. The other was his winsome humanity. He loved the gracious office of peacemaking, and many were the feuds, both domestic and civil, which he reconciled. "Never was he seen crying aloud or straining beyond measure, or irritated even when he had to rebuke some one; but, while he was down upon their sins, he would pardon the sinners, and thought it meet to take his example from the physicians who, while they heal their sicknesses, show no wrath against the sick; for he counted it human to sin, but the part of a god or a godlike man to correct the errors."[4] "Such was the manner of his philosophy—meek, gentle and blithe."[5]

Such then is Lucian's rival to Jesus; and, while acknowledging the beauty of the conception—so artistic, so statuesque, so thoroughly Greek—one cannot wonder that it failed to gain the suffrages of mankind or draw away the hearts of sinful mortals from the Redeemer. One prominent feature of Demonax which distinguishes him from Jesus is *his absolute unoriginality*. He was an eclectic, a

[1] §§ 5–6. [2] § 6. [3] § 10. [4] § 7. [5] § 9.

mere gleaner in other men's fields; and this of itself is sufficient to place an immeasurable and impassable gulf between him and Jesus. It must seem indeed to a believer a slight tribute to pay to our Blessed Lord, yet it is a fact which should be observed in this connection, that not only did He bring into the world a conception of God, man, and human life which is recognized by believers as nothing less than a divine revelation and has exercised the subtlest intellects for more than eighteen centuries, but this conception is an absolutely new thing. It has its roots indeed in the religion of Israel, but it transcends the latter. Jesus was no disciple of lawgivers or prophets. He was their Lord; they had spoken of Him, and He handles their sacred oracles with sovereign authority, interpreting, expanding and fulfilling them.

It is significant, too, what features of Jesus Lucian omits in painting his rival picture. It is plain that, like Celsus, he was offended by the σκάνδαλον of the Cross. The burden of grief which Jesus carried all His days and which crushed Him at last, displeased this Greek's artistic instincts, and he depicts one of excellent wisdom yet of sunny temper, who won the love of his fellows, living admired and honoured and dying amid universal lamentation. How different from Him who was "despised and rejected of men," and died that shameful death on Calvary! It was an ideal picture, and Lucian seems to have had misgivings of its possibility. He understood human nature too well to imagine it possible for a good man to go through life unhated and arouse no resentment by his steadfast opposition, however gentle, to the prejudice and vice of his fellows; and he makes the admission with evident reluctance. "Both the general populace of Athens and the magistrates exceedingly admired him, and continued looking to him as one of the superior order, although at first he offended most of them and incurred no less hatred than

Socrates with the multitudes on account of his boldness of speech and freedom." [1]

The truth is, that very feature of Jesus which chiefly displeased Lucian was His distinctive glory. It was the σκάνδαλον of the Cross that made Him the Saviour of the world. Whatever praise may be accorded to Demonax, he was no saviour and had no message of help or hope for suffering and sinful mortals. "The only thing that pained him was disease or death, since he reckoned friendship the chiefest good among men." [2] It is precisely here, in the hour of mortal weakness, that consolation is supremely needed; but Demonax had none to give. He had nothing better to offer the afflicted than a string of Stoical commonplaces, mere aggravations of the suffering they pretended to cure. "By and by the things that pain will cease, and a certain oblivion of things good and ill and long freedom will overtake us all." [3] "When one was mourning for his son and had shut himself up in darkness, he went to him and said that he was a magician and could bring up his child's ghost, if only he would name to him any three men who had never mourned. The man hesitated long and was puzzled, for he had none such, methinks, to mention; and Demonax said: 'Then, you ridiculous person, do you suppose that you are the only one whose lot is intolerable when you see no one who is a stranger to mourning?'" [4] How cheerless such consolation beside that hope of immortality which Jesus brought to light and His Apostles preached!

2. Side by side with the intellectual movement which found in Lucian its most distinguished representative, and which aimed at the suppression of superstition and the introduction of a rational view of life, another and very different movement was in progress. It was nothing less than an attempt to rehabilitate Paganism, and its most remarkable phase is the Neo-Pythagoreanism which arose

[1] § 11. [2] § 10. [3] § 8. [4] § 25.

in the reign of Augustus. This school revived the mystic philosophy of Pythagoras and reinforced it with Oriental theosophy.[1]

The most interesting of the Neo-Pythagoreans was Apollonius of Tyana, the hero of a ponderous yet not unprofitable romance by the elder Philostratus. It is impossible to determine what measure of fact the narrative may contain, but it is certain that the historical Apollonius has been marvellously embellished by his biographer. Philostratus was much inferior to Lucian as a literary artist, and his ideal wise man is little better than a vulgar charlatan, strikingly like the pseudomantis, Alexander of Abonoteichos, that "Cagliostro of the second century" whom Lucian has so mercilessly scourged. The story is that Apollonius was born, apparently in the same year as our Lord, in the Cappadocian town of Tyana, his birth, like our Lord's, being heralded and attended by portents. He studied a while at Tarsus, contemporary with Saul, the future Apostle, and then betook himself to the neighbouring town of Ægæ, where he acquired a knowledge of medicine in the temple of Æsculapius and embraced Pythagoreanism. On the death of his father he divided his inheritance among his poorer relatives and set out on his travels. He visited India, and there conversed with the Brahmins and was initiated into their magical lore. Then he journeyed westward again, and visited Greece, Egypt, Rome, and Spain, attended everywhere by a band of disciples. Wherever he went, he wrought wonders and was revered as a god. He settled eventually at Ephesus, where St. John ministered contemporaneously; and at the age of nigh a hundred years he died or rather vanished from the earth.

Although, like Lucian, Philostratus simply depicts his

[1] Justin Martyr had recourse to a philosopher of this school during his fruitless search after truth and happiness before his conversion to Christianity (*Dial. c. Tryph.*).

hero and does not expressly set him forth as a rival to Jesus, his purpose is unmistakable. Nor did it go unperceived. About the year 305 A.D. appeared an anti-christian work entitled the *Philalethes*, in which Jesus and Apollonius were elaborately compared and the superiority of the latter asserted. The author was Hierocles, who, as judge at Nicomedia, distinguished himself by his activity in Diocletian's persecution of the Bithynian Christians, and in recognition of his zeal was promoted to the governorship of Alexandria. The *Philalethes* is lost, and is chiefly known by the replies it elicited from Eusebius [1] and Lactantius.[2] Nor should it be forgotten what use was made of the Life of Apollonius by the Deists of the seventeenth century.[3]

It was the selfsame task that Lucian and Philostratus took in hand. They both desired to discredit Jesus, and each of them essayed to depict a rival who should put Him to shame and draw off from Him the admiration and worship of mankind. It was the selfsame task that both essayed, but each essayed it in a different fashion. Lucian abhorred superstition, and depicted a wise man entirely free of it; whereas Philostratus, as became a votary of Neo-Pythagoreanism, depicted his hero as a wonder-worker of the first order. At point after point he brings Apollonius and Jesus into tacit competition, with the obvious suggestion: "See here a thing more marvellous than your Gospels tell of! What think ye of your Jesus now?"

It is with disgust, not unalloyed with pity, that one reads the story. A fair sample of it is this horrible incident which occurred at Ephesus, and which is so interwoven with superstition that one would fain believe it to be without a shred of truth. The city had been stricken with

[1] *In Hierocl.* included in Olearius' edition of Philostratus.
[2] *Instit.* v. 2–3.
[3] Charles Blount's *Life of Apollonius*, bks. i.–ii., London, 1680.

plague, and appealed to Apollonius for help. He assembled the men in the theatre and, pointing to a poor old beggar, blind—or, as the story says, feigning blindness—ragged and dirty, with a few crusts in his wallet, bade them stone him. Hesitatingly they obeyed, and their pity for the wretch vanished when they perceived the demon in his flashing eyes. When the bloody work was done they cleared away the stones and found the battered carcase of a huge dog.[1] If such was the credulity of a philosopher what gross darkness must have covered the multitude, and how extreme the world's need of the visitation of the day-spring from on high!

As an attack upon Christianity the Life of Apollonius is unworthy of serious consideration, and is chiefly interesting as a singularly pathetic chapter in the history of superstition. It may not be amiss, however, to observe two striking contrasts between Jesus and Apollonius. One is furnished by *their teaching*. Apollonius is set forth as a rival to the Teacher of Israel, yet there is hardly one memorable saying in those eight ponderous books, each of them twice as long as the Gospel according to St. Matthew. Any single verse of the Sermon on the Mount is richer in wisdom than all the discourses which Philostratus has put in the mouth of his hero. And even such poor wisdom as the latter possessed was not his own but had been derived from his master and the Brahmins of India. The other contrast is presented by *the respective attitudes of Jesus and His rival toward the opinions of their times*. Apollonius was imbued with the spirit of his age and shared to the full its superstitions and limitations. Not only did he espouse opinions which have since been proved mere fantasies of primitive ignorance, but he promulgated theories of his own which, though applauded by his biographer for

[1] iv. 10; cf. Apocryph. First Infancy: Devil expelled from Judas in form of a mad dog.

their supernatural wisdom, simply amuse the modern readers by their childishness. When, for instance, he reached the western coast of Spain, he observed the phenomenon of the ocean's ebb and flow, so surprising to one who had lived by the tideless Mediterranean;[1] and he accounted for it by the *naïve* theory that there are vast caverns at the bottom of the sea, and when the wind which fills them rushes out, it forces the water back upon the land; then, when it returns like a great respiration, the water subsides.[2] How different with our Lord! It is impossible to read the evangelic narratives without remarking His singular detachment from current theories. "One of the strongest pieces of objective evidence in favour of Christianity," says the late Dr. G. J. Romanes,[3] "is not sufficiently enforced by apologists. Indeed I am not aware that I have ever seen it mentioned. It is the absence from the biography of Christ of any doctrines which the subsequent growth of human knowledge—whether in natural science, ethics, political economy, or elsewhere—has had to discount. This negative argument is really almost as strong as is the positive one from what Christ did teach. For when we consider what a large number of sayings are recorded of—or at least attributed to—Him, it becomes most remarkable that in literal truth there is no reason why any of His words should ever pass away in the sense of becoming obsolete. . . . Contrast Jesus Christ in this respect with other thinkers of like antiquity. Even Plato, who, though some 400 years B.C. in point of time, was greatly in advance of Him in respect of philosophic thought, . . . is nowhere in this respect as compared with Christ. Read the Dialogues, and see how enormous is the contrast with the Gospels in respect of errors of all kinds, reaching even to absurdity in respect of reason, and to sayings

[1] cf. Caes. *Bell. Gall.* iv. 29. [2] v. 2.
[3] *Thoughts on Religion*, p. 157.

shocking to the moral sense. Yet this is confessedly the highest level of human reason on the lines of spirituality, when unaided by alleged revelation." Whatever be the explanation, the fact remains that, so far as the record goes, Jesus never uttered a syllable which entangled His teaching with any of the popular notions of His day, nor yet with any of the vexed questions of science or criticism which have since emerged. When the Inquisition condemned Galileo, it was not to the Gospels but to the Book of Joshua that they went for evidence of the Ptolemaic astronomy; when the evolutionary theory was propounded, it was not with the teaching of our Lord but with the Book of Genesis that it seemed to be in conflict; and reverent criticism may assign what date or authorship it will to the Old Testament documents unchecked by a single pronouncement of Jesus.

The chief apologetic significance of these two attempts to rival our Lord and dethrone Him from the place He had won in the love and reverence of believers, lies in their emphatic condemnation of the theory that the Evangelic Jesus is not the Jesus of history but an idealized picture of Him. It is difficult, in view of the manner of their composition, to conceive the possibility of idealization in the Synoptic Gospels, which are not original writings but mosaics of traditions. The first three Evangelists were not authors but editors; their task was the arrangement of existing material, and they could not, even had they wished, have given play to their imaginations. But with the Fourth Gospel it is different. It is widely believed to have been written about the middle of the second century, and to be not so much an history of Jesus as a philosophy of the Incarnation, emanating from the school of Alexandria and coloured by Gnostic speculations; and, on this view of it, it may reasonably be brought into comparison with those

two efforts, practically contemporary with it, to pourtray an ideal teacher. No sooner, however, is the comparison attempted than the absolute impossibility of regarding the Johannine Jesus as an ideal creation of the second century becomes apparent. The Fourth Gospel is a transcendently marvellous work. It has fulfilled, according to the late Mr. T. H. Green, "the special function of representing the highest thought about God in language of the imagination, and has thus become the source of the highest religion." This were a wondrous achievement for any writer in any age, but the wonder of it reaches the point of incredibility when one considers what manner of period the second century was, and what its best intellects were capable of producing. It may safely be asserted that Lucian and Philostratus represented, each in his own way, the highest culture of their times. They were both philosophers, and had both thought earnestly about the problems of life and religion; yet how utterly, even ludicrously, they failed when they essayed to depict the ideal teacher! Is it conceivable that, where they so signally failed, another quite unknown, with no advantage of intellect or environment, should have so signally succeeded, transcending the resources of his poverty-stricken age and embodying an ideal which for eighteen centuries has evoked the admiration of mankind, and is acknowledged by one of the subtlest thinkers of modern times as "the source of the highest religion"? Surely the Johannine Jesus is no ideal creation, but a presentation of the historic Jesus, not indeed as He had appeared to the world, but as He had manifested Himself in the wonder of His grace and glory to the heart of a sympathetic and adoring disciple.

It may, however, be urged that it is not necessarily a question of intentional idealization. The contention is rather that the historic Jesus was transfigured by the faith of the primitive Church, and it is this coloured and dis-

torted image that is depicted by the Evangelists. The latter did not, like Lucian and Philostratus, set to work with a deliberate purpose of idealizing, but they saw Jesus from the standpoint of their time and through the atmosphere of their religious and intellectual environment; and thus "the conception of Jesus in the gospels represents not only the historical likeness as its traits were preserved in the primitive evangelic tradition, but also the religious interests of the age in which and for which these narratives were originally drawn up." [1]

Now, if it be incredible that the evangelic image of Jesus is a consciously idealized creation, it is surely tenfold more incredible that blind and groping ignorance should thus have chanced upon it, blundering into a conception which puts to utter shame the best imagining of the highest culture and intelligence of the age; like that ancient painter who, unable to represent the foam on a horse's mouth, dashed his brush at the canvas in a rage and produced the very effect he desired. Had the Evangelists deliberately set themselves to idealize the historic Jesus, they could have produced at the best a Demonax or an Apollonius; while, had the primitive tradition been unconsciously modified by the faith and thought of the Church, the result must have been not idealization but degradation. It were indeed no marvel had some skilful hand painted a picture of Jesus which, though unhistorical, should yet have been a harmonious and noble conception; but that a multitude of scattered traditions should have taken shape and resolved themselves into that matchless image which is enshrined in the Gospels, *ἐν οἷς ἐγκαθέζεται ὁ Χριστός*,[2] were a miracle no whit less stupendous than that "fortuitous concourse of atoms" whence, on the Lucretian theory, this wondrous universe originated *ἄτερ θεοῦ*.

[1] Moffatt, *Hist. N. T.*, p. 11.
[2] Irenaeus, *Adv. Hær.* III. ii. 8.

In a quiet nook of Scotland lies a little town, remote from the throng of cities and the highways of commerce. It is an old-world place, and certain of its red-tiled and moss-grown dwellings bear dates of the seventeenth or the sixteenth century inscribed over their crumbling lintels. Built here and there into their rude walls one observes blocks of masonry, broken and defaced, yet skilfully shaped and carved with artistic devices. How comes it that they are found in so unworthy a setting? Hard by stand the grey ruins of an ancient castle which, if tradition be true, sheltered King Robert the Bruce ere he had won Scotland's liberty; and when "the rude forefathers of the hamlet" were minded to build them dwellings that venerable pile served them as a convenient quarry. At a glance one recognizes those fragments of nobler handiwork amid their rough and alien setting.

Even thus does the evangelic portraiture of Jesus shine amid the ignoble rubbish of contemporary ideals, putting them to shame and proclaiming itself of diviner origin. It requires no other guarantee of its verisimilitude than the simple fact that it is what it is. And if it be asked how it comes to pass that it is what it is, the only adequate and reasonable answer is that the Evangelists had before them the vision of that wondrous life, and faithfully and reverently set it forth; being withal singularly aided by that "Spirit of wisdom and revelation" Who "enlighteneth the eyes of the heart in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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