**SIMON MAGUS** (“ Simon the Magician Gr. *μayos,* a wizard), a character who appears in the New Testament and also in the works of the Christian Fathers. In Acts viii. 5-24 he is portrayed as a famous sorcerer in Samaria who had been converted to Christianity by Philip. His personality has been the subject of considerable discussion. The conclusions to which the present writer has been led are mainly as follows: (1) that all we know of the original Simon Magus is contained in Acts; (2) that from very early times he has been confused with another Simon; (3) that the idea that Simon Magus is merely a distortion of St Paul is absurd.

As regards the story of Acts viii. 5-24, it will suffice to make a few remarks. First it is interesting to note that Simon Magus was older than Christianity. The first missionary enterprise of the nascent Church brought it into contact with a magician who had for a long time amazed the people of Samaria with his sorceries *(v.* 11). This person gave himself out to be “ some great one," but the popular voice defined his claims by saying “ this man is that power of God which is called Great." Such a voice of the people cannot be imagined in Judaea, but Samaria was more open than Judaea to the influence of Greek ideas. Readers of Philo are familiar with the half-philosophical and half-mythological mode of thought by which the “ powers of God ” are substantialized into independent personalities. There were powers of all sorts, powers of help and salvation and also powers of punishment (Philo i. 431). It was through these powers that the incorporeal world of thought was framed, which served as the archetype of this world of appearance. The various powers are sometimes summed up under the two heads of *βασιλική* and *εύερϒετική,* which correspond to the two names *κύριοs* and 0εós. Which of them—if it is lawful at all to argue from Alexandria to Samaria—is to be identified with the one called "great ” we have no means of deciding. Not­withstanding his own success as a magician Simon Magus was amazed in his turn at the superior power of Christianity. But he did not understand that this power was spoilt by self-seeking, and his offer of money to the Apostles, to enable him to confer the gift of the Holy Ghost, has branded his name for ever through the use of the word “ simony ” (*q.v.*). He was, however, a baptized Christian, and accepted with meekness the rebuke of Peter. The last that we hear of him is his humble entreaty to the Apostles to pray for him. Had the writer of Acts known anything of his subsequent adventures, he might certainly have been expected to give some hint of them.

There is no reason for identifying the Simon Magus of Acts with the Simon, also a magician, who was a friend of Felix, and employed by him to tempt Drusilla away from her husband Azizus, the king of the Emesi. The name Simon was common, and so was the claim to magical powers. But the Simon of Josephus *(Ant.* xx. 7, § 2) is expressly declared to have been a Jew and a native of Cyprus.

The Apostolic Fathers say nothing about Simon Magus, but with Justin Martyr we get. startling developments. In his *First Apology,* written in a.d. 138 or 139, he tells us that one Simon, a Samaritan, from a village called Gitta or Gittae (see *Ency. Bibl.* iv. col. 4538), performed such miracles by magic acts in Rome during the reign of Claudius, that he was regarded as a god and honoured with a statue “in the river Tiber, between the two bridges, having an inscription in Latin as follows: Simoni Deo Sancto.” “ And almost all the Samaritans,” he goes on to say, “ and a few among the other nations, acknowledge and adore him as the first God. And one Helen, who went about with him at that time, who before had had her stand in a brothel, they say was the first thought that was brought into being by him ” *(Apol.* 1. 26. 1-3). Justin goes on to speak, as from personal knowledge, of the feats of magic performed by Menander, another Samaritan and a disciple of Simon’s, who persuaded his followers that they would never die. After Menander Justin proceeds to speak of Marcion, who was still teaching at the time. The followers of Simon Magus, of Menander and of Marcion, he says, were all called Christians, but so also Epicureans and Stoics were alike called philosophers. He had himself composed a treatise against all the heresies that there had been, which he was willing to present to the imperial family *(Apol.* i. 26. 4-8). As Justin was himself a Samaritan it is natural that his fellow-countrymen should bulk largely in his eyes. Accordingly we find him reverting to Simon and Menander in a later passage of the same *Apology,* where he repeats that in the royal city of Rome, in the time of Claudius Caesar, Simon so astonished “ the holy Senate ” and the Roman people that he was worshipped as a god and honoured with a statue *(Apol.* i. 56), which Justin petitions to have taken down. In the *Second Apology* also there is a passage which seems mutilated or mis­placed, in which he declares himself to have “ despised the impious and misleading teaching of the Simonians in his own nation ” *(Apol.* ii. 15. 1). In the *Dialogue* (349 c, ch. 120) he prides himself on the independence and love of truth which he had displayed in the *Apology.* “ For,” he says, “in writing to Caesar, I showed no regard even for any of my own nation, but said that they were deceived by trusting in a magician of their own race, Simon, whom they assert to be God, above all rule and authority and power ” (cf. Eph. i. 21).

Such is the testimony of Justin; what is it worth? In 1574, during the pontificate of Gregory XIII., a stone was dug up in the island of the Tiber bearing the inscription— “ Semoni Sango Deo Sacrum Sex. Pompeius ” (see SEMO Sancus). This discovery has led many to suspect that Justin Martyr has somehow been hoaxed. The stone is not the only one of its kind, and it is a serious charge to bring against Justin to suppose him guilty of so silly a confusion as this. But Justin Martyr was decidedly weak in history, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he may have confused the Simon of *Acts* with a heretical leader of the same name who lived much nearer to his own time, especially as this other Simon also had a great reputation for magic. A full century must have elapsed between the conversion of Simon Magus to Christianity and the earliest date possible (which is the one that we have adopted) for the composition of Justin Martyr’s *First Apology.* That work is assigned by Schmiedel and others to about a.d. 152. Justin Martyr could not have been mistaken as to the fact that the bulk of his countrymen were followers of a religious leader named Simon, whose disciple Menander he seems to speak of as an elder con­temporary of his own. But having a mind void of historical per­spective he identified this Simon with Simon Magus.

When once this identification has been made by Justin, it was taken for granted by almost all subsequent writers. The tempta­tion to trace all heresy to one who had been condemned by Peter was too strong for the Fathers.@@1 Dr George Salmon brought light into darkness by distinguishing between Simon of Gitta and the original Simon Magus. What has not perhaps been so clearly perceived is the consequence that all that is told about Helen refers to the later Simon.

With Hegesippus, who wrote during the episcopate of Eleutherus (a.d. 176-189), as with Justin, Simon heads the list of heretics, but there is no identification of him with Simon Magus; indeed, the context plainly excludes it (Eus. *H.E.* iv. 22).

During the same episcopate Irenaeus was appointed bishop of Lyons. In his work *Against Heresies* (i. 16) we hear for the first time of opposition on the part of Simon to the Apostles after his pretended conversion. His magic, we are told, pro­cured him the honour of a statue from the emperor Claudius. He was glorified by many as God, and he taught that it was he who appeared among the Jews as the Son, in Samaria as the Father and among other nations as the Holy Spirit. He was indeed the highest power, the Father, who is above all, but he consented to be called by whatever name men chose to give him. Irenaeus then goes on to tell how at Tyre Simon rescued Helen from prostitution, and took her about with him, saying that she was the first thought of his mind, the mother of all things, by whom in the beginning he had conceived the idea of making angels and arch-angels. For that this Thought (ευυοια), recognizing her father’s will, had leapt forth from him, and de­scended to lower regions, and generated the angelic powers by whom this world was made. But after she had done so she was detained by them through ill-will, since they did not wish to be thought the offspring of any other being. For, as for himself, they knew nothing at all about him. But his Thought had been detained by the angelic powers which had been sent forth from her, and had been subjected by them to every indignity, so that’ she might not return on high to her own father, insomuch that she was even enclosed in a human body, and for age after age transmigrated into different female forms, as though from one vessel into another. For she had been also in that Helen who was the cause of the Trojan War. But while she passed from body to body, and consequently suffered perpetual indignity, she had at the last been prostituted in a brothel; she was “ the lost sheep.” Wherefore he himself had come to free her from her bonds, and to confer salvation upon men through knowledge of himself. For as the angels were mismanaging the world, owing to their individual lust for rule, he had come to set things straight, and had descended under a changed form, likening himself to the Principalities and Powers through whom he passed, so that among men he appeared as a man, though he was not a man, and was thought to have suffered in Judaea, though he had not suffered. But the prophets had delivered their prophecies under the inspiration of the world-creating angels : wherefore those who had their hope in him and in Helen minded them no more, and, as being free, did what they pleased; for men were saved according to his grace, but not according to just works. For works were not just by nature, but only by convention, in accordance with the enactments of the world-creating Angels, who by precepts of this kind sought to bring men into slavery. Wherefore he promised that the world should be dissolved, and that those who were his should be freed from the dominion of the world-creators. Irenaeus con­cludes his account by saying that this Antinomian teaching had its logical consequence in his followers, who lived licentious lives and practised every kind of magic. They also, he adds, worshipped

@@@1 Clement of Alexandria *(Strom.* vii. § 107) alone seems to have an inkling that there was something wrong. He puts Simon after Marcion, and yet refers in the same breath to his acceptance of Peter’s preaching.