

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Editor: DR. PAUL CARUS.
Assistant Editor: T. J. McCORMACK.

Associates: { E. C. HEGELER.
MARY CARUS.

VOL. XVII. (NO. 7)

JULY, 1903.

NO. 566

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CHICAGO

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NAPOLEON ON THE BRIDGE OF ARCOLE.

After the oil painting of Baron Gros.

Frontispiece to The Open Court.

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M. PÉRÈS'S PROOF OF THE NON-EXISTENCE OF NAPOLEON.

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION.

ONE of the best satires ever written in the literature of the world is Jean Baptiste Pérès's *Grand Erratum* which appeared in 1827. Its shafts are aimed at a book of M. Dupuis, a scholar of great erudition, who believed that all religions, and the story of Jesus of Nazareth as well, could be explained as solar myths.¹

The leading idea of M. Pérès's pamphlet is perhaps not original with him. In the year 1819 Archbishop Whately had published anonymously a similar satire under the title *Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Bonaparte*, directed against the logic of David Hume's scepticism, and it is not impossible that M. Pérès heard of this pamphlet and that thereby the main argument of his plan was suggested to him. It is, however, highly improbable that he ever saw or read Whately's elaborate expositions, else he would undoubtedly have made use of many details.

Archbishop Whately is very ponderous and imitates the subject of his criticism to such an extent that one may read many passages and whole pages without being able to detect the slightest trace of the author's irony. In fact, many of his arguments are not travesties at all, but are literally true. The life of Napoleon as it is popularly told not only in France but also in other countries does contain mythical elements, and ancient stories told of mythical heroes were told of this latest and most extraordinary representative of historical prodigies.

The difference between Whately's ponderous sarcasm and M. Pérès's sprightly wit is characteristic of the two nationalities of

¹ *L'Origine de tous les Cultes, ou la Religion Universelle.* Par M. Dupuis. Paris, 1796.

the authors, and while appreciating the one, we need not detract from the other.

Jean Baptiste Pérès was Professor of Mathematics and Librarian of Agen, a small town of southern France. He was noted in the circle of his friends for his conservative tendencies in both politics and religion. His literary fame, however, rests entirely upon this little brochure on Napoleon in which he so successfully pilloried the superficial methods of rejecting historical evidences solely because they contain some mythical ingredients. His *Grand Erratum* appeared in several editions and has been translated into almost all European languages. It was hailed by conservatives of every stripe and color, and he was praised as the David who with a pretty pebble picked up from the bank of a brooklet had killed the Goliath of Biblical Criticism.

The truth is that the first attempts at Text as well as Higher Criticism were of a purely negative character. Every miracle and indeed every remarkable fact was explained as a myth, and it is only recently, within the last two or three decades, that our Higher Critics have begun to appreciate the conservative character of all religious traditions. We now know that both the Old and the New Testaments contain ingredients of unquestionably historical reliability, and though they have frequently been re-edited and revised under the influence of later dogmatic tendencies, portions of them (e. g., in Genesis) are much older than would suit the most rigorous conservatives of former years.

The sole excuse for republishing M. Dupuis's *Grand Erratum* is the fact that it is out of print and forgotten. No copy can be found in any of the Chicago libraries. Nor does it exist in the Congressional Library at Washington, and we could only with great difficulty through the courtesy of Messrs. Kegan Paul & Co. get hold of a second-hand copy in England, which is a translation made from the French by a young lady who writes under the name "Lily," and is accompanied with an introduction by Richard Garnet, LL. D., of the British Museum. It bears no date and is published by E. W. Allen, London.

GRAND ERRATUM. THE NON-EXISTENCE OF NAPOLEON PROVED

BY JEAN BAPTISTE PÉRÈS.

Napoleon Bonaparte, of whom so much has been said and written, never even existed. He is nothing more than an allegorical personage. He is the personification of the sun; and we can prove our assertion by showing how everything related of Napoleon

the Great has been borrowed from the great luminary. Let us see briefly what we are told of this remarkable man.

We are told :

That he was called Napoleon Bonaparte ;

That he was born in an island in the Mediterranean sea ;

That his mother's name was Letitia ;

That he had three sisters and four brothers, three of whom were kings ;

That he had two wives, one of whom bore him a son ;

That he put an end to a great revolution ;

That he had under him sixteen marshals of the empire, twelve of whom were in active service ;

That he prevailed in the South, and was defeated in the North ;

To conclude, that after a reign of twelve years, begun upon his arrival from the East, he departed, and disappeared in the Western seas.

It remains for us to ascertain whether these various details are borrowed from the sun, and we hope that every reader of this disquisition will rise convinced that this is the case.

1. In the first place, every one knows that the sun is called Apollo by the poets. Now, the difference between Apollo and Napoleon is not a great one, and it will appear very much less still if we go back to the meaning and origin of these names. It is unquestionable that the word Apollo means *Exterminator* ; and it seems that this name was given by the Greeks to the sun on account of the injury it did them before Troy, where a part of their army perished from the excessive heat, and from the pestilence that followed at the time of the outrage perpetrated by Agamemnon on Chryses, priest of the sun, as we read at the beginning of the *Iliad* of Homer. The brilliant imagination of the Greek poets transformed the rays of the luminary into flaming arrows, hurled on all sides by the angry god, who would soon have exterminated everything if his wrath had not been appeased by the release of Chryseïs, daughter of Chryses, the sacrificial priest.

This, then, is probably the reason why the sun was called Apollo. But whatever the cause or circumstance which occasioned the giving of such a name to this luminary, it is certain that the name means *Exterminator*.

Now, Apollo is the same word as Apoleon. They are derived from Apollyô (*ἀπολλύω*), or Apoleô (*ἀπολέω*), two Greek verbs which are really the same, and which mean "destroy," "kill," "exterminate."

Thus, if the fictitious hero of our century were called Apoleon, he would have the same name as the sun, and would besides fulfil the meaning of the name; for he is pictured to us as the greatest exterminator of men who ever existed. But this personage is called Napoleon, and thus his name contains an initial letter which we do not find in the name of the sun. Yes, there is an extra letter, an extra syllable even; for, according to the inscriptions cut in every part of the capital (Paris), the real name of this supposed hero was *Néapoleon*, or *Néapoleon*. This is more particularly to be seen on the column of the Place Vendôme.

Now, this extra syllable makes no difference whatever. The syllable, no doubt, like the rest of the name, is Greek; and in Greek *ne* (*νη*), or *nai* (*ναι*), is one of the strongest affirmations, equivalent to our *veritably*, or *yea*. Whence it follows that Napoleon means Veritable Exterminator,—Veritable Apollo; it means, in truth, the sun.

But what is to be said of his other name? What connection can there be between the word *Bonaparte* and the star of the day? At first it is not at all evident, but this at least can be understood: that as *bona parte* means “good part,” it has no doubt to do with something consisting of two parts, a good and a bad, with something which in addition is connected with the sun, Napoleon. Now, nothing is more directly connected with the sun than the results of his diurnal revolution, and these results are day and night, light and darkness; the light produced by his presence, and that darkness which prevails during his absence. This is an allegory borrowed from the Persians. They have the reign of Ormuzd and Ahriman, of light and darkness, of good and bad spirits. And it is to these last, spirits of evil and darkness, that people used formerly to devote their foes, using the following imprecation: *Abi in malam partem*. If by *mala parte* was meant darkness, no doubt *bona parte* meant light,—day as opposed to night. There can then be no doubt that this name is connected with the sun, especially when it is seen to be associated with Napoleon, who is himself the sun, as has been already demonstrated.

2. According to Greek mythology, Apollo was born in an island in the Mediterranean (the Isle of Delos); an island in the Mediterranean has, therefore, been fabled as the birth-place of Napoleon; and the preference has been given to Corsica, because the relative positions of Corsica and France, where he was to be made to reign, correspond best to those of Greece and Delos, where were situated the chief temples and oracles of Apollo.

Pausanias, it is true, calls Apollo an Egyptian divinity; but it does not follow that an Egyptian divinity must be born in Egypt; it is enough that he should be there regarded as a god, and that is what Pausanias meant. He designed to inform us that the Egyptians worshipped Apollo, and that establishes yet another connection between Napoleon and the sun; for Napoleon is said to have been held in Egypt to be invested with supernatural qualities, to have been regarded as the friend of Mahomet, and to have received homage partaking of the nature of adoration.

3. His mother is said to have been named Letitia. But by the word Letitia (or "joy") was meant the dawn whose first tender light fills all nature with joy. It is the dawn, say the poets, which brings forth the sun, flinging wide for him the portals of the East with her rosy-tipped fingers.

Again it is worthy of remark that, according to Greek mythology, the mother of Apollo was called *Leto* (Λητώ). But if the Romans made Latona of Leto, it has been preferred in our century to change it into Letitia, because *letitia* is the noun derived from *letor* (obsolete form, *lato*), which means "to inspire joy."

Assuredly, then, this *Letitia*, no less than her son, belongs to Greek mythology.

4. According to tradition, this son of Letitia had three sisters, and there can be no doubt that these three sisters are the three Graces, who, with their companions the Muses, were the ornaments of their brother Apollo's court.

5. This modern Apollo is said to have had four brothers. Now, as we shall show, these four brothers are the four seasons of the year. Let us not be startled, at the outset, at seeing the seasons represented by men rather than women. It ought not even to seem an innovation, since, in French, only one of the four seasons, the autumn, is feminine; and even with respect to that our grammarians are disagreed. But in Latin *autumnus* is no more feminine than the other three seasons, so there is no difficulty on that point. The four brothers of Napoleon may very well represent the four seasons, and what follows proves that they really do so.

Of Napoleon's four brothers, three, they tell us, were kings; these three kings are Spring, who reigns over the flowers; Summer, who reigns over the harvest; and Autumn, who reigns over the fruit. As these three seasons derive all their potent influence from the sun, we are told that Napoleon's three brothers held their sovereignty at his hands, and reigned only by his authority. And when it is added that of Napoleon's four brothers one was not a

king, it is because one of the four seasons—Winter, reigns over nothing. But if, to invalidate our parallel, it were alleged that Winter was not without sway, and if it were wished to ascribe to him the dismal principality of the frosts and snows which whiten our land at this melancholy season, our answer would be ready: that, we should say, is what was designed to be shown by the empty and ridiculous principality with which this brother of Napoleon is said to have been invested after the fall of all his family. This principality has been described as in connection with the village of *Canino*, in preference to any other, because *Canino* comes from *cani*, which denotes the white hairs of chill old age, and they recall winter. For, to the poet, the forests crowning our hill-sides are locks of hair; and when Winter covers them with his hoar frost, it is the white hairs of failing nature in the old age of the year.

Cum gelidus crescit *canis* in montibus humor.

Thus the pretended Prince of Canino is nothing more than the personification of winter. Winter begins when nothing more is left of the three good seasons, and the sun is at his greatest distance from our country, which is invaded by the furious *children of the north*, the poet's name for the winds; the winds come from northern climes, discolor our land, and cover it with a detested whiteness. This has given rise to the fabulous account of the invasion of the northern nations into France, where they are said to have done away with a parti-colored flag adorning it, and to have substituted a white one which entirely covered it, after the exile of the fabulous Napoleon. It would be idle to repeat that this is merely emblematical of the rime that the winds from the north produce in the winter, and which obliterates the charming colors that the sun produced in our land, before he waned and departed from us. It is easy to see the analogy of all these things with the ingenious fables conceived in our century.

6. According to these same fables, Napoleon had two wives; hence two wives have been attributed to the sun. These two wives are the moon and the earth: the moon according to the Greeks (Plutarch is our authority), and the earth according to the Egyptians; with this noteworthy difference, that by the moon the sun had no issue, and by the earth he had a son, *an only son*. This child was the little Horus, son of Osiris and Isis; that is to say, of the sun and the earth, as may be seen in the *History of the Heavens*, Vol. I., p. 61 and following. It is an Egyptian allegory, where the little Horus, born from the earth impregnated by the sun, repre-

sents the fruits of agriculture. Even so the birth of the supposed son of Napoleon has been fixed at the 20th of March, the period of the vernal equinox, because in the spring agricultural produce undergoes its most important phase of development.

7. Napoleon is said to have put an end to a devastating scourge which *terrorised* all France, and was called the Hydra of the Revolution. Now, a hydra is a serpent, of what kind matters little, especially when the serpent is fabulous. The Python, an enormous serpent, was the cause of great terror in Greece; Apollo slew the monster, and dissipated the fear of the people; this was his first exploit. Hence we are told that Napoleon began his reign by crushing the French Revolution, which is itself as much a chimera as everything else. For *revolution* is obviously derived from the Latin word *revolutus*, which denotes a curled-up serpent. The Revolution is the Python, neither more nor less.

8. The celebrated warrior of the nineteenth century had under him, we are told, twelve marshals at the head of his armies, and four were not in active service. Now, the twelve first are obviously the twelve signs of the zodiac, marching under the orders of the sun Napoleon, each of them commanding a division of the innumerable army of the stars, which is called the *celestial host* in the Bible, and is divided into twelve parts, corresponding to the twelve signs of the zodiac. Such are the twelve marshals who, according to our mythical chronicles, were actively employed under the Emperor Napoleon. The four others, in all probability, are the four cardinal points, which, fixed amid universal motion, are very well symbolised by the inactivity of which we have spoken.

Thus, all these marshals, active and inactive, are purely symbolical beings, with no more reality than their leader.

9. We are told that this leader of so many brilliant armies overran in triumph the countries of the south, but that, having penetrated too far north, he was there unable to maintain himself. Now, these details precisely apply to the sun's course. The sun, it is well known, rules supreme in the south, as is said of the Emperor Napoleon. But it is most worthy of note that, after the vernal equinox, the sun makes for the northern regions, and moves further away from the Equator. But when he has taken his course in this direction for three months, he encounters the North Tropic, which compels him to retreat and go back the way he came to the south, following the sign Cancer, or Crab; which sign, according to Macrobius, derives its name from the retrograde course of the sun in this region of the globe. This, then, is the material from

which has been drawn Napoleon's imaginary northern expedition to Moscow, together with the humiliating retreat by which it is said to have been followed.

Thus everything we have been told of the success or defeat of this strange warrior is nothing more than a series of allusions to the course of the sun.

10. Finally, and this needs no explanation, the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, as all the world knows. But to the spectators at the extremities of the earth, the sun seems to rise from the eastern sea in the morning and to plunge into the western sea at night. It is, moreover, thus that poets describe his rising and setting.

That, then, is all we are to understand when we are told that Napoleon came by sea from the east (Egypt) to reign over France, and that he disappeared in the western seas after a reign of twelve years. The twelve years are nothing more than the twelve hours of the day during which the sun shines on the horizon.

"He reigned but a day," says the author of *Les Nouvelles Messéniennes*, speaking of Napoleon; and the way in which he describes his rise, decline, and fall shows that, like ourselves, this delightful poet saw in Napoleon nothing more than an image of the sun. And in truth he is nothing more. His name proves it; his mother's name proves it; his three sisters, his four brothers, his two wives, his son, his marshals, his exploits,—all prove it. It is proved, moreover, by his birthplace; by the regions whence, we are told, he came before entering on his career of dominion; by the time he employed in traversing those regions; by the countries where he prevailed, by those where he succumbed; and by the place where he vanished, pale and *discrowned*, after his brilliant course,—to quote the poet Casimir Delavigne.

It has, then, been proved that the supposed hero of our century is nothing more than an allegorical personage, deriving his attributes from the sun. It follows that Napoleon Bonaparte, of whom so much has been said and written, never even existed; and this fallacy, into which so many people have fallen headlong, arises from the amusing blunder of mistaking the mythology of the nineteenth century for history.

We might further have appealed in support of our contention to a great number of royal ordinances, whose indisputable dates are evidently irreconcilable with the reign of the pretended Napoleon; but we have had sound reasons for letting them alone.