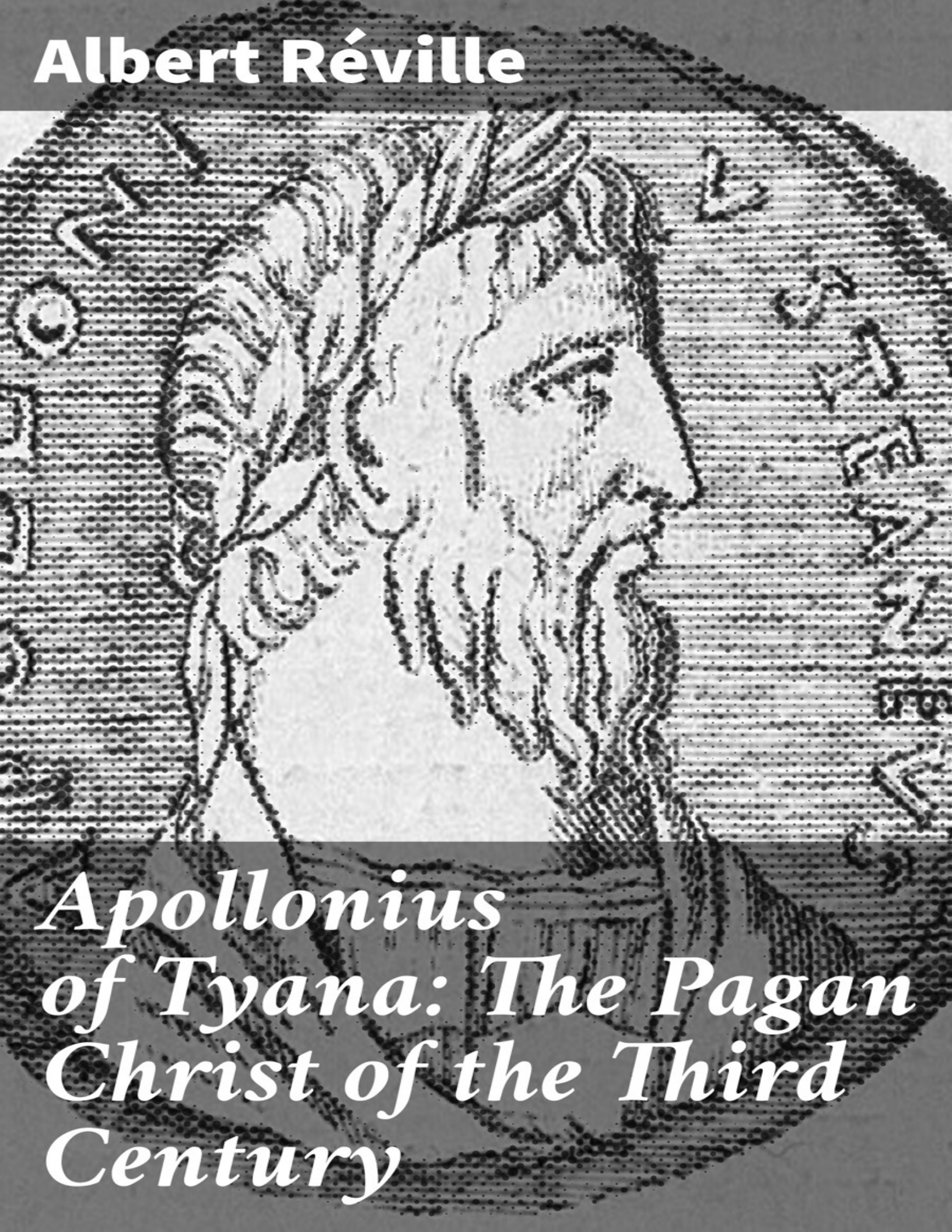


Albert Réville



*Apollonius
of Tyana: The Pagan
Christ of the Third
Century*

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Apollonius of Tyana: The Pagan Christ of the Third Century



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APOLLONIUS OF TYANA AND THE IMPERIAL COURT OF SEVERUS AND HIS SUCCESSORS.

THE acknowledged triumph of Christianity during the reign of Constantine has always been considered one of those unaccountable revolutions and one of those historical surprises which, unconnected as they seem to be with any phenomena of the past, might almost be deemed miraculous. One longs to find out by what process the human mind passed so rapidly from a contemptuous and utter denial of the teachings of Christianity to an interest in and an avowed sympathy for the doctrines of the new creed. It has long been thought that this problem could not be solved; and yet, in point of fact, in this as in many other cases, the transition was caused by no sudden shock, and modern critics have discovered a series of what we may call middle

terms which will henceforth tell very materially upon the history of the progress of religious thought in the world.

It was in the fourth century, immediately after the most violent persecutions, that Christianity, though embraced and professed by the minority only, succeeded in attaining to a commanding position in matters both social and political. During the third century, however, an attentive observer might have foreseen the dawn of this unexpected triumph from certain internal convulsions which were then affecting Paganism. An extraordinary change had taken place in the ideas of the Pagan world. People were very far from avowing themselves openly as Christians, and yet they were making decided efforts to Christianise the old creed, that of natural religion. An anxiety was evinced that this old creed should be imbued with more spiritualism, that it should become more moral, and, moreover, that it should be purified from all traditional absurdities and impurities. And, further, it was believed that the religious ideal which had been dreamt of could only be realised in an incarnation, in a perfectly holy and perfectly beautiful human life, which should enable that ideal to lay hold upon the consciences of men; hence various means were devised to furnish reformed Paganism with a like gift to the one enjoyed by the Christians, through the Gospel, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In a word, an attempt was made to introduce a Pagan Christ. The absurdity, we might almost say, the childish simplicity of these attempts must not blind us to their importance and to their historical value. There is a certain mixture of grandeur of conception and pettiness of realisation which constitutes the very moral essence of this remarkable era, in which the old religion, foreseeing its imminent decline, conceived the idea of

prolonging its days by the adoption of those outward trappings and outward forms which belonged properly to its younger rival.