



Anthony P. Politzer

THE RABBI OF LISZKA

AND

THE POSSIBILITIES OF
CHRISTIAN SCIENCE IN
THE TWENTIETH CENTURY.



A Personal Experience.

BY ANTHONY P. POLITZER.

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AERICAN and European papers have in recent years frequently informed their readers of miracles that are said to have occurred in certain localities, also of wondrous deeds and faith-cures, performed through miracles, or by Christian Science healers; of the last of these that are said to have occurred close to the end of the nineteenth century, the first relates to the claim of a miraculous faith-cure of the boy Louis Gallinger in Brooklyn, by praying before the shrine of "Our Lady of Lourdes"; and the second to the contest before Surrogate Fitzgerald, New York, to prevent the probate of the will of Miss Helen C. Brush,

who became a true convert to the faith of Christian Science five years before her death, leaving about \$60,000 to the First Church of Christ. Scientist.

The testimony given by Christian Science healers, especially that of Mrs. Augusta E. Stetson, first reader of the First Church of Christ. Scientist, who have been called as witnesses in this celebrated case, was a most remarkable one. All of whom being the faithful disciples of Mrs. Mary Baker G. Eddy, the discoverer and founder of Christian Science, and authoress of the book "Science and Health," declared that there is no such thing as disease in the human body, but only in the human mind, claiming for Christian Science supernatural ability and

absolute divine power of healing, except when there is not sufficient understanding of the principles of Christian Science on the part of the patient or of the healer, or of both; and eventually even the possibility of raising the dead.

Although hundreds believe and are ready to prove such occurrences and ability, thousands again, who pretend to enjoy the benefits of this enlightened twentieth century, and for professional and other reasons, ridicule the possibility of miracles or such supernatural ability, and at most are willing to account for the same, with the advance in hypnotism and the power of suggestion; and while the discussion of such theories will always more or less agitate the minds of man,

the subject itself must ever be without satisfactory explanation.

An extraordinary event which transpired forty-one years ago may tend to solve the question and determine whether miracles and wondrous acts, as in ancient times, are also possible in the present century.

To the incident which I am about to narrate, John J. Pollak, a cousin of mine, and myself were living witnesses, and it may therefore be proper to let the reader know something of our early life up to the time of my story in 1859.

John was educated in Vienna, Austria, and while a student took part in the Revolutionary Movement of 1848. Later he became a commercial traveller.

I was educated in Budapest, Hungary, graduating from the Commercial High School in 1847.

The following year I entered the Revolutionary army under Ludwig Kossuth, serving in the horse artillery as sergeant.

Two wounds, one in my right calf inflicted with the lance of a Russian Cossack and one in the neck from a bullet, proved that I had the courage to face death in battle.

At the end of the Revolution I was appointed by the Austrian Government an officer of the First Hungarian State Railroad, being attached as auditor to the staff of the first director at Budapest.

Two years later I left the employment of the Railroad and came to Vienna.

There I took a position as a bookkeeper, and before long was considered one of the most competent in the city.

From the above I believe the reader will be convinced that we were not lacking in courage, enlightenment or experience.

In 1859 it happened that we were both employed by the same firm in Vienna, and each had a married sister living in Abaúj-Szántó, a small city near Tokáy, Hungary, in which place their husbands—two brothers—Ignatz and Jonas Gross, were in business; the first was my brother-in-law and the latter that of my cousin John.

As we had not visited our relatives before, we gladly accepted their invitation to the approaching vintage, and, obtaining

a month's leave of absence from our firm, arrived early in October, 1859.

At a distance of about sixteen English miles from Abaúj-Szántó, in an obscure corner of the world, is a small village called Liszka, noted then on account of a certain Rabbi who resided there, and whose fame for performing wondrous acts gave it prominence all over the country.

Hardly a day passed that new events were not related to us, and it seemed as if the Rabbi could accomplish any feat desired by his visitors. Strangest of all was it that the believers in his power were not restricted to Jewish people; — counts, barons, citizens and peasants contributed their enthusiastic share towards proclaim-

ing the Rabbi as a wonderful and godly man.

Compensation was not accepted by the Rabbi, who, with his family, lived on a paltry salary; and the only expenditure permitted a visitor was to spend a trifle on the poor of the village.

My sister even assured us that for years she had had some internal trouble which the doctors could not cure, yet, after seeking and following the Rabbi's advice, she became perfectly well.

All this we level-headed young men took good-naturedly enough as the best of jokes in our experience, and every attempt to show our disbelief was met with expressions of pity from our relatives.

We were there a few weeks when a young man entered the store to inform the Gross brothers that his father, who kept a small grocery shop in a nearby village named Tarczal, could not meet a note due for 600 guildens and requested an extension of three months.

As the note had been previously renewed he was told that half the amount must be paid within three days, while the balance would be extended three months; and unless this were done, execution would be taken against his father's store.

The young man left, and we were informed that the debtor, an old man with a large family, did nothing else but study the Talmud day and night, either at home or with the Rabbi in Liszka, while his

wife and children attended to the store; furthermore that he would surely pay when forced to.

So after three days, as nothing was heard from the old man, execution papers were procured, and it was arranged that Jonas with a marshal should start next morning to enforce the execution.

The same evening at about half past eight o'clock John and Jonas left the store, as Jonas resided half a mile away. After closing the store Ignatz and myself entered the dining room in the same building—which was his home—meeting my sister there.

It was then quite dark; I struck a match and lit the lamp on the table. Ignatz, who stood beside me facing a

mirror, gave a scream, and grasping my arm pointed to the mirror, exclaiming, "See! the Rabbi of Liszka." I looked in the mirror but could not see anything of the Rabbi, nor did my sister. "For heaven's sake," said Ignatz, trembling and pale, "Can't you see the Rabbi sitting with his friends around a table with large open books before them, and the old man from Tarczal sitting at his left hand conversing with him?" My sister and I were greatly frightened, believing Ignatz to have lost his reason, and tried to pacify him, but it was of no avail; a moment later he again looked into the mirror, and saying—"Thank God, the apparition has vanished"—immediately became calm, telling us that he was not mistaken, that

the apparition lasted several minutes, and that the supernatural occurrence caused him great anxiety.

Supper was served, but we could not partake of it. Suddenly the door was opened and there stood my cousin John, with a sword in his hand, shaking and looking ghastly. "Come quickly," he said, "I believe Jonas has gone mad and I am almost paralyzed with fear. Arriving at home and entering the room which was lit up, Jonas pointed to the mirror and cried: 'Look! the Rabbi of Liskka is there talking with the old man from Tarczal, can't you see him?' I said 'no.' 'What,' said he, 'Is it possible you don't see him?' and turning pale he fell unconscious to the floor.

"I called my sister, who was bewildered at the situation, left Jonas in her care and hastened to you."

Hearing this we all became alarmed and hurried to Jonas.

By the time we arrived Jonas was resting on a couch worrying over the incident which he believed to be a warning from the great Rabbi, who no doubt wished to protect his old friend from Tarczal; after being informed of the same occurrence to Ignatz, he insisted that the execution be dropped even at the risk of losing the entire amount, which course was eventually decided upon.

Next day at about noon, while still under the influence of our strange experience and repeating for the fiftieth time

how it happened, who should walk in but the old man from Tarczal, a tall, venerable looking person with a long white beard; who, extending his hand to meet the welcoming grasp of Ignatz and Jonas, said that he had visited the Rabbi in Liszka yesterday, requesting his advice on account of being threatened with execution and ruin.

"The good Rabbi told me," he said, "not to worry, as he knew you well, and he was positive you would not injure me; also that I should call upon you and extend his greeting and assure you of my willingness to pay the debt after the vintage as soon as I have sold my wines."

"Certainly," said Ignatz, "the good



* * * grasping my arm pointed to the mirror,
exclaiming, "See! the Rabbi of Liszka,"

Rabbi was right, and we accept your promise and wish you success."

Expressing his thanks the old man departed.

The impression this visitor left was remarkable. While it operated like a charm, relieving the depressed consciences of Ignatz and Jonas, it brought home to John and myself the conviction that what we had witnessed the night before was an event which we could not comprehend, but which certainly seemed a rebuke for our unbelief.

The immediate result was, that the pleasure of our trip was destroyed; our relatives took advantage of the affair to attempt to convert us to their opinion, but

it was a situation unbearable for any length of time.

It required only a few days to arrive at the conclusion that the proper thing for us to do was to "take the bull by the horns" while we had the chance; therefore one afternoon, with little ceremony, we stood in the presence of the Rabbi.

The Rabbi of Liszka was a slender man about 55 years of age, with stooping shoulders, broad forehead—indicating intellect—and large blue eyes, expressing extreme kindness; his features earnest, regular and pleasing; his long black locks and beard mixed with grey, gave him a venerable appearance. He was dressed in dark grey, his coat reaching to the ankles, and he wore a small black velvet skull cap.

We could not help being greatly impressed by this remarkable man, and scarcely do I need a more powerful illustration to justify the impression than the eloquence of his subsequent speech in Hungarian, German and Hebrew alternately, and his convincing arguments, which made us cease to wonder at the influence he exerted and the esteem which he enjoyed, even beyond the circle of his co-religionists.

On entering the room we found the Rabbi in the company of several aged men. Perceiving us he advanced, and heartily welcoming us, said: "No doubt you are the guests of the Gross family in Szántó. Really I am glad you have come and I am happy to make the acquaintance

of two enlightened and intelligent young gentlemen."

The last sentence certainly sounded like mockery to our confused minds, but, accepting it with good grace, we expressed our pleasure at meeting him, thus carrying out our intention of paying him our respects before our return to Vienna.

"That is very kind of you," said the Rabbi, "all the more so, that in these times young men rarely show any interest in religious matters, much less in men of my standing. May I then ask the cause of your kind resolution? But first be seated, please."

"Honored Rabbi," I said, "You will have to excuse my directness, but it will not serve our purpose to beat about the

bush; truly we came here to be relieved by you of the doubts which have assailed us, since certain events which have happened a few days ago in the Gross family, and which we have witnessed; events, to all appearances, instigated by you. Now, if it were not a decided hallucination on the part of the Gross brothers and if what they claim to have seen in the mirrors be true, we cannot comprehend the phenomena, as it seems supernatural." After this I related the incident as it transpired, and remarked: "After all, it seems that imagination played its part, otherwise how was it possible that they could see the apparition while we could not?"

"My friends," said the Rabbi, "in the first place there were no apparitions in the

mirrors, therefore it was impossible for you to see them."

"Is it then a fact," said I, "that the whole was a pure illusion?"

"Let me explain," said the Rabbi. "While there were no apparitions in the mirrors, yet everything the Gross brothers have stated to you is true. It was not their persons or bodies but their souls, which I have called to account into my presence the very moment my old friend from Tarczal pleaded his cause, and what they saw was with the spiritual eye alone, the mirrors had nothing to do with what you term the apparition. How then could you, being unconcerned in the affair, share the warning intended solely for the Grosses?"

"Dear Rabbi," I said, "the words just uttered create an impression within me which I can hardly describe; never before have I faced a man who exerted seemingly such supernatural influence upon his fellow-man, and while I am not in a position to doubt your great power, yet it is impossible for us to surrender completely, because we live in a practical and enlightened century. Suppose we should relate to the world our extraordinary experience without being able to show conclusively the possibility of such power, would it not expose us to ridicule? I therefore believe that we are justified in claiming the privilege of receiving convincing proof from you."

"My young friends," replied the Rabbi,

"far from being inclined to avoid the question, it gives me great pleasure to discuss it, hoping it may result to your satisfaction; so kindly pay attention to what I have to say.

"Our Sages taught:

"הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא גּוֹזֵר וְהַצַּדִּיק
מַבְטֵל."

"הַצַּדִּיק גּוֹזֵר וְהַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא
מְקַיֵּם."

" 'The Holy One, blessed be He, decrees, but the pious are privileged to intervene and hinder.'

" 'The pious decree, and the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills.'

"God to His glory created man in the divine Image and with everlasting spirit,

and endowed him with unlimited power that he might subdue the earth and have dominion over every living thing upon the earth, in the sea, as well as birds in the air, and God loves to be overruled by those His creatures who are pious and God-fearing, and while deeds of such appear to be supernatural, their power of execution, through godly inspiration, is perfectly natural with them, for these faithful servants of the Eternal God are His chosen messengers of ancient and present times.

“Of the many instances related in our Holy Scriptures upon which our Sages based the above mentioned quotation, let me cite a few:

“When the children of Israel had for-

gotten their Heavenly Father in the absence of Moses upon Mount Sinai, and compelled Aaron to make the Golden Calf, after which the people exclaimed, 'This is thy God, O Israel, who brought thee out of Egypt.' The Eternal God thought to exterminate them, had not Moses, His chosen one, pleaded for them to Him to calm His wrath, that He might not destroy them; and when the children of Israel rebelled against the Lord, after hearing the report of the messengers whom Moses had sent to Canaan, the body of the people cried out to stone Joshua and Caleb, and they said one to another, 'Let us appoint a captain and go back to Egypt!' The Lord appeared and said to Moses: 'How long will this people provoke me? I will

smite them and make of thee a greater nation.' Moses however prayed to the Lord to forgive the iniquity of the people according to the greatness of His mercy. And the Lord said: 'I have pardoned according to thy request.'

"We find that Joshua in the battle with the Emorites commanded the sun to stand still upon Gibon and the moon in the valley of Ayalon, and they stood still in the midst of the heavens and hastened not to go down for a whole day, and the Lord hearkened unto the voice of man.

"When Achab, King of Israel, in his sin wherewith he induced Israel to sin, provoked the Lord God of Israel to anger with vanities; we find that the Prophet Elijah said unto Achab: 'As the Lord the

God of Israel liveth there shall not be in these years dew or rain, except according to my word.'

"And it lasted many days, when the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, 'Go show thyself unto Achab and I will give rain upon the face of the earth where the famine was grievous in Samaria.' And not until Elijah went up to the top of Carmel and cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees, did the heavens blacken with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.

"Of the Prophet Elisha it is told:

"His advice to the poor widow, who cried that the creditor has come to take her two sons unto himself for servants.

"And Elisha said unto her, 'What shall I do for thee? Tell me, what hast thou in thy house?' And she said, 'Thy hand-maid hath nothing in the house save a cruse of oil.'

"And he said, 'Go, borrow for thyself vessels from abroad, from all thy neighbors, empty vessels, let them not be a few.

" 'Then go thou home, lock the door behind thee and behind thy sons, and pour oil into all those vessels, and that which is full thou shalt set aside.'

"So she went from him and locked the door behind herself and behind her sons, who brought the vessels near to her the while she poured out the oil.

"And it came to pass, when the vessels

were full, that she said unto one of her sons, 'Bring near to me yet another vessel.' And he said unto her, 'There is no other vessel.' And the oil remained.

"Then came she and told it to the man of God, and he said, 'Go, sell the oil and pay the debt, and thou shalt live of the rest with thy children.'

"Now my humble life, efforts and deeds seem agreeable to our merciful God, as they are devoted to the good and welfare of mankind regardless of creed, and never have I had cause to regret the consequences of my acts in applying the power and godly gift entrusted to me.

"The incident with the Gross brothers can prove that to you. The man from Tarczal I have known for many years

as poor, but strictly honest. I also know the Gross brothers and their circumstances; the wife of one has even once consulted me as to her ailments, so in order to prevent the Gross brothers from committing a great sin of which they—as men in business—seemed unconscious, it was my duty to intervene, and by divine inspiration I was able to accomplish my purpose. The future livelihood of the poor old man and family is now assured, and the Gross brothers will receive payment in a short time without becoming eternal sinners."

"Many thanks, dear Rabbi, for your extraordinary explanation, yet your mention of my sister as having consulted you about her ailments, induces me to say that

we were well aware of her three years' suffering, during which time she had been under treatment of the most eminent physicians and professors in the country without beneficial result. My sister now claims that after following your advice she has been restored to health again, and considers it—as do many others—miraculous; all the more so, that it was accomplished without the use of any drugs, but merely by bathing and praying which she continued for ten days. Yet, while we admit that my sister at present enjoys good health, we nevertheless hesitate to ascribe it to a miracle, but rather to natural causes."

"My friends," said the Rabbi, "It is not to be expected that you or the major-

ity of the class who have a claim on enlightenment should concede anything that seems supernatural, and yet you cannot help acknowledging, that eminent physicians have failed to cure Mrs. Gross before she sought my advice; but I beg of you not to construe its meaning, that I should seem to assume having cured her or any one else; the fact is, that many sick persons who consulted me were cured, but always through their own efforts and devotion by acting upon my advice.

"To whom shall we look and trust for relief in sickness and distress when human beings are powerless to help us? To God alone, the merciful Creator of all the living, and I say with King David the psalmist, 'Our help is in the name of the

Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.' Only people without any faith will ever doubt that man has the power to reach the Holy Throne of God, although it has been proven thousands of times that prayers are the winged Angels readily welcomed by God the Almighty, and that the suppliants are judged with mercy!

"If your sister has been cured it was in merciful response to her own sincere prayers, and you might well call it miraculous; the bathing was merely advised by me as a precaution, that she might appear pure and stainless during her prayer—her soul offerings to the Lord."

"Honored Rabbi," I said, "your kind and remarkable explanations are most

satisfactory, and I confess, with pleasure, have set aside all our doubts; but kindly permit me to ask one more question."

"Continue," said he, patiently.

"How does it happen that in our present time we so seldom hear of men capable of doing wondrous deeds, while our ancient history is full of these recitals?"

"My friends," said the Rabbi, "it is true that in ancient days the appearance of men such as you refer to was more frequent and not restricted to a privileged nation. We find many instances of them in our bible and history, and the possibilities are the same to-day. Good and God-fearing men and women we may find at all times and among all nations and

creeds, but in the last centuries the mind of mankind has been occupied with different objects, the result, it is claimed, being the great progress made in civilization, science, ethical culture, enlightenment and inventions of importance. Who can expect that under such conditions men of my vocation should develop abundantly.

“The world has become so imbued with modern progress that men like myself are considered out of place. Whether mankind will be made happier I doubt. Where true religion is neglected, real happiness, contentment and eternal hope are impossible.

“Many believe that because of numerous inventions and discoveries they have the

right even to deny the existence of a Supreme Being and Ruler of the Universe, forgetting their insignificance, and that whatever their genius may be able to produce is merely the reflected lustre of the spirit and godly gift that the Creator has planted in their bodies of dust and corruption.

"Others again are mere hypocrites! Religion to them is a necessity to cover many frailties; their seemingly good and charitable deeds rarely emanate from their hearts, but from selfish motives.

"The Almighty has destined that there shall be rich and poor; not as reward or punishment, but for the sake of purifying mankind. The rich man has the opportunity of helping his neighbor by showing

his brotherly love, to earn his gratitude and to receive the reward of eternal bliss. Instead of that we seem to see a continuous struggle to make the poor man poorer, and Heaven knows what the end will be.

“But let me tell you the Almighty, who created man and blessed him that he should fill and own the earth, will not permit such injustice and abnormal conditions forever. His commands cannot be transgressed without punishment. Entirely absorbed in the accumulation of wealth, this class never stops to reflect upon the vanity of its efforts and that only a short span of time separates it and all from the grave, at the brink of which worldly fortunes are not needed and must be left behind.

“What would then be the object of all holy commands if the life of man would cease the moment the body breathes its last? That eternal life will forever be ours to enjoy the promised reward for the good or punishment for evil deeds during our wanderings upon the earth is our best hope.

“A more convincing demonstration thereof I cannot cite, than the reverence the world will forever entertain for the memory of all great men and women who in all ages have accomplished their godly mission by elevating mankind in according liberty, equality and justice to all. From Moses down to Washington, their good and fruitful deeds are as immortal as are their souls.

“The good deeds of our great patriot Kossuth—whose friendship I had the good fortune to enjoy—and his noble protectress Queen Victoria of England, will certainly receive the immortal reward they deserve; while the memories and souls of men and women who were tyrants, oppressors and evil doers will be accorded the full deserts of their evil deeds on earth.

“How wise and great are the destinies which the Eternal in His mercy has provided for mankind!

“His decree condemning man (to earn his bread in the sweat of his brow) was merciful, because work and activity alone bring happiness.

“That man must die and cannot live forever is his greatest blessing; it is the

natural safeguard for the possible continuance of the human race upon the earth.

“ My young friends, you will soon return to assume your worldly occupations, as you have to contribute your proper share towards this progressive age, but should you find time to remember our meeting kindly bear in mind my words, that any good deed you will do with your whole heart will make you really happy and lift your soul into the presence of your Creator, who will protect you from evil. But under all circumstances in life remain true to the faith you are born in; strive to be religious, upright and honest; then your reward will be old age, you will be blessed with children and grandchildren, and be content!”

More than forty-one years have gone by since then, the only living witnesses to my story are: Jonas, residing in Vienna, my sister Fanny—mother of the famous actress, Fräulein Jenny Gross—residing in Berlin, and myself.

My cousin John emigrated to the United States in 1863, interested himself in politics and was appointed inspector in the New York Custom House, serving under the administrations of Presidents Grant Garfield and Arthur.

John was never a religious man, his only ambition being to accumulate wealth. My poor cousin died in 1899, but was never blessed with a child to mourn at his grave.

I came to New York in 1871, and since the day I met the Rabbi have striven to live up to his advice. I have been blessed with children and grandchildren, and, though possessing little worldly fortune, feel content.

Thus even were the prophetic parting words of the great Rabbi of Liszka fulfilled to

THE END.