

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

AND THE GOSPEL OF THE INFANCY

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THAT Jesus Christ was born of a Virgin is part of the Catholic faith.¹ All admit that the Gospels, in their present form, assert it (M I¹⁶, 18-25 and L I³⁴⁻³⁵ 3²³). The Church has again and again formally declared it, explaining her assertion as implying not only t^h negative doctrine that Jesus Christ had no h^{er} father, but that His Mother remained virgin ^{after} His birth as before it, throughout the whole ^{of her} life. No further commentary upon, nor ^{philosophical} deductions from, her doctrine does she ^{allow.} That the doctrine is untrue was, however, ^{and advanced} both in ancient and modern times; and of ~~this~~ ^{the} attack we shall first give an outline.

I

I. Cerinthus (c. 100), herald of the Judaizing Gnostics, declared that Jesus was not virgin-born because (Irenæus says with simplicity²) "it seemed to

¹ The formula *Born of the Virgin Mary* recurs in the creeds. Pope Siricius in 392 approves the condemnation of Bonosus' assertion that Mary, virgin at Christ's birth, bore other children; Leo I. in 449 dwells, against Eutyches, upon the miracle of a virginity inviolate by child-bearing; in 539 John II. repeats this, using as normal the title *ever-virgin*; the Lateran Council of 649 proclaims Mary ever-virgin and immaculate, her virginity persisting indissoluble even after her Son's birth, and Toledo XI. (675) expands its stately paradoxes. Paul IV. in 1544 reaffirms against the Socinians that Mary "ever persevered in integrity of virginity, that is, before the Birth, in it, and after it." This tradition is undisputed. Bannwart-Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, ed. 10, 1908, 2 etc., 86, 91, 144, 202, 256, 282, 993.

² *Adu. Hær.*, I. xxvi. 2, P.G., 7⁶⁸⁹ [we shall thus refer to the volume and column of the *Patrologia Graeca* (P.L. = *Patr. Latina*) of Migne].

him impossible." Deity could not be sullied by human contact: the Christ, therefore, or the Spirit, descended at the Baptism on the son of Joseph and Mary. So too Carpocrates (c. 125).¹ Justin (c. 150) shows that the modern arguments were, in all essentials, anticipated.

In Justin's *Dialogue* the Jew Trypho attacks the Virgin Birth: Isaiah's famous prophecy,² he argues, is mistranslated: the Hebrew *'almah* means "young woman" (so Theod., Aq.), not "virgin" (LXX.). The promise was fulfilled in Hezekiah (*Dial.*, 67). A pre-existent Christ, born in time, is "disconcerting [*παράδοξον*: contrary to (general) expectation?] and indeed nonsense" (48). In short, "do not dare," he says, "to tell fairy tales, lest you be proved as frivolous as the Greeks"—referring to the hero-births to which Justin, as an *argumentum ad hominem*, had compared (in *1 Apol.*, 54: 6⁴⁰⁰) Christ's.³

Origen puts into the mouth of Celsus (c. 180) language which many a modern rationalist would not disavow.

The Isaian prophecy is denied (c. *Cels.*, i. 34); hero-births (e.g. Plato's) alleged (c. 37); and especially the blasphemy, already current, that Jesus was born of Mary and Panthera—a legend which in some shape or other survived for centuries.⁴ To refer to this, says Origen, is mere ribaldry (c. 32, 37: 11^{719, 783}).

But Jerome's controversy with Helvidius (who denied Mary's *perpetual* virginity, c. 383) is even more striking. Helvidius argues as follows:—

Mary is Joseph's "espoused wife"; destined, therefore, to full wedlock. M 1¹⁸ implies that in time the marriage was con-

¹ For the Ebionites, *infr.*, p. 5, n. 2.

² 7¹⁴: *Ecce uirgo concipiet* Vulgate; ἰδοὺ ἡ παρθένος LXX.; . . . νεάνις Theodotion, Aquila.

³ *P. G.*, 6^{629, 580}. Cf. Irenæus' opponents, 7⁹⁴⁵, etc. A few Gentile converts believed Christ of human parentage. *Ir.*, 6⁵⁸¹; cf. *Orig. in Mt.* xvi. 12: 13¹⁴¹³. They were formally disapproved.

⁴ Panthera (or Pandera): the name is genuine and not an anagram (Deissmann, Nöldeke): usually represented as a centurion. The story is highly involved, and may be connected with pre-Christian legend. It is taken up in the Talmud, reappears in the thirteenth-century pamphlet *Toledoth Jesu*, and in modern literature of a scurrilous description. See Herford, *Christianity in Talmud and Midrash*, pp. 35, 348; Lagrange, *Messianisme chez les Juifs*, p. 288, 1909.

summated (c. 3). Joseph knew her not *until* she brought forth her first-born; he did so, therefore, *afterwards* (c. 5), and she had later sons (c. 9). Indeed, the Gospels speak of Jesus' brethren (c. 11). Finally, virginity is no holier than wedlock (c. 18): *P.L.*, 23^{185, 189, 192, 202}. The arguments adduced in the controversy with Jovinianus, c. 385, and by Ambrose against Bonosus, c. 390 (*De institutione uirginum*, c. 5: 16³¹⁴) add nothing new.

2. The modern attack¹ begins with Voltaire, and takes definite form first in the system which deals with the Gospels as with *historical or poetical* "myths," according as it conceives the objective, historical facts to have been distorted by the author's tendency to account supernaturally for natural events, or at least to *idealize* them.² Genuine "myth"—the dressing-up of a doctrine in historical guise, though no, or barely any, objective fact corresponding to the tale exist at all—is the system of D. F. Strauss' *Life* (1838).³ Popular feeling, individual writers, moulded the myth round the memory of a man who may not even have existed. Gradually the legend grew—and here the system profited by Chr. Baur's new theory, that the Gospels were but second-century productions. Not only had an O.T. "Messiah-myth" long been in existence, and needed but to be applied to a popular name; but a century and more was to elapse, during which it might grow into the full, familiar Gospel. Thus, it was foretold Messiah should be born at Bethlehem, and work miracles. Jesus, therefore, must have been born there, and shall be credited with miracles. The Shepherds, the Magi, are complementary stories picturing the universality of His influence. He dies, but this influence survives, indestructible; His

¹ Cf. Durand, *L'Enfance de Jésus-Christ*, Paris, 1908 (Engl. tr., Philadelphia, 1910), c. 3, p. 35. We warmly recommend this little book, to which we are throughout deeply indebted.

² Cf., e.g., Gottlob Paulus, *Leben Jesu*, 1828. The application of his method is often clumsy—angelic apparitions he explains as dreams; Gabriel, as a flesh-and-blood adventurer.

³ Thus, "Jesus denounces the spiritually barren synagogue. This may be fact. He describes it as a barren, withered fig-tree. This is parable. Soon the *myth* grows up that He cursed and shrivelled a real fig-tree."

name is exalted—that is, He is risen and ascended. Historically, a virgin birth, a resurrection, are false; “religiously,” they are eternally true.—Now that Baur’s theory is universally abandoned, literary criticism dissects the Gospel texts, assigning to “editors,” or interpolation, the passages teaching the Virgin Birth. Thus, the “original” genealogy in Matthew made Joseph the father of Jesus;¹ in the “earliest” form of Luke I, verses ³⁴⁻³⁵ were missing;² and the theories are many and complicated—too much so for M. Loisy, who allows the Gospels to be no patchwork: the Evangelists wrote what we read and meant what we believe, but only because the “faith” of even that early date dictated this.³

To this “faith” Prof. O. Pfeiderer assigned⁴ three stages: first, men felt that Jesus was the Saviour-Messiah—was made God’s “Son” by adoption, at the Resurrection or else at the Baptism. So Mark; so the earlier parts of Acts and of Paul. But afterwards Paul remembered the Rabbinic notion of the ideal Man, the pre-existent Image and “Son” of God—he it was who revealed himself in flesh; while John, under the spell of Alexandrian theosophy, acknowledges a genuine “incarnation” of the Word. But though Jesus was thus *morally* and *metaphysically* “Son of God,” neither Synoptists, nor Paul, nor John felt this to conflict with His purely human descent. A *virgin* birth is not yet above the horizon. Quite late, in the second century, it was asked, If He be Son of God, why give Him a human father? Heroes, born of gods and women, abounded in mythology. A synthesis was made: *physically*, too, Jesus should be God’s Son, and His mother, a virgin. The Gospels were then “emended” at the bidding of this now completed “faith.”⁵

We propose succinctly to consider the authenticity of the Gospel “Infancy” record, especially in view of

¹ Schmiedel, *Biblical Encycl.*, iii. 2962; *infr.*, p. 13.

² Cf. Harnack, *Hist. of Dogma*, vol. i. p. 100, n. 1, Engl. tr., 1897; *infr.*, p. 6.

³ A. Loisy, *L’Évangile et l’Église*, ed. 2, 1903, p. 31.

⁴ *Das Christusbild des urchristlichen Glaubens*, 1903.

⁵ See Cheyne’s *Biblical Encyl.*, art. MARY, NATIVITY, etc.; and F. C. Conybeare, the *Standard*, 11th May 1905, for examples of popular sentiment. The *Declaration on Biblical Criticism by 1725 Anglican Clergymen*, ed. H. Handley, 1906, asks that the historicity of the narrative of Christ’s conception be kept an open question.

early Christian belief, and in relation to the rest of the New Testament, with which it is considered to conflict: we shall examine a few particular points on which Matthew and Luke are said to contradict themselves, or one another, or to be intrinsically at fault; finally, we shall discuss the sources given as those of the Infancy narrative by those who do not believe it reposes upon fact.

II

It is said, first, that the Gospels, as they stand, give us no true presentment of the facts. The text has been tampered with.¹ We hear:—

(i.) (a) The Ebionites'² copy of *Matthew* began only at c. 3, the Mission of the Baptist.—But we know this only from Epiphanius;³ if then we accept it, we must also accept his statement (*ib.*) that they had *struck off* cc. 1 and 2 in the interests of their heresy. He also says (*ib.*) that the Nazarene Ebionites used the full text, as did the early heretics Cerinthus and Carpocrates.⁴ So there is no extrinsic evidence that Matthew began, originally, with the Mission of John.

(b) The unity of M's "Childhood Gospel" is only

¹ We must here disregard the argument that the Gospels must be untruthful because they relate miracles, and miracles cannot happen. Eliminate the miracles, it is suggested, and you will find the historical substratum of fact. Be that as it may, all we assert, here, is that there is no *evidence* of an "original" Gospel of which ours is a later edition modified in the interests of the Virgin Birth.

² A vague name attached to very early heretics of Judaizing tendencies or (Duchesne, *Hist. anc. de l'Eglise*, i. 124) a survival of Judæo-Christians, in a state of "arrested" development, or retrogression, as to dogma. Some admitted, some rejected, the Virgin Birth. Origen, *c. Cels.*, v. 61: 11¹²⁷⁷; Eus., *H.E.*, iii. 27: 20²⁷³. Those rejected it who believed Jesus to have become Messiah at His baptism. Epiph., *Adv. Hær.*, I. xxx. 16: 41⁴³².

³ *Ib.*, 14.

⁴ Tatian's *Harmony of the Gospels* omits M's genealogy (as it does L's), not because it did not exist, but because Tatian aimed at giving, not a *complete* but a *continuous* account of the contents of the Gospels (though *infr.*, p. 13); anyhow, he keeps 1¹⁸⁻²⁵, which contain the Virgin Birth. Though in some MSS. M 1¹⁸ begins in capital letters, that may be merely because the genealogy was omitted in public readings.

artificial. The genealogy originally made Jesus the son of Joseph, and was clumsily altered by an editor to fit the Infancy stories, which in their turn were affixed to the pristine record. This centres wholly round 1¹⁶, on which *cf. infr.*, p. 15, n. 3.

(ii.) The internal unity of Luke's "Infancy" seemed, till recently, obvious to all, and its homogeneity with the rest of his Gospel to most; though the heretic Marcion, unable to believe, not, like the Ebionites, that Jesus had God for His Father, but that He had a woman for mother, struck out of his text the whole Infancy record;¹ while Schmiedel² would, on the *a priori* assumption that the earliest Gospel *must* have been Ebionite, assign 2²¹⁻⁵², where Christ seems but an ordinary Jewish child, to an ancient document, while the "supernatural" 1-2²⁰ is a later addition.—But 2²¹ clearly *supposes* 1³¹—the flow of the chapters is quite continuous. To put this down to "editorial touching up" which conceals original divergences, and then to tell us what those divergences were, is perverse.

Prof. Harnack is, however, contented if L 1^{34, 35} be suppressed as interpolated. (a) L is consistent in his use of particles. But here appear *διὸ* (*wherefore*), else only in 7⁷ (which H. considers doubtful), and *εἰτε* (*seeing that*), found perhaps nowhere else in the Third Gospel. But all critical editions keep *διὸ* in 7⁷; and H. (who argued thus in 1901) has since (1906) proved Acts to be by the same author as that Gospel, namely, Luke. But in Acts, *διὸ* occurs frequently!—(b) Verses 34, 35 are said to break the flow of the chapter, adding a new and discrepant explanation of the Child's origin to that in 31, 32. They add to it, granted: they do not contradict it. Mary's question, "How shall this be?" etc., is natural enough, when all the circumstances, so far, had been so strange; doubly natural if she had resolved to remain a virgin, as Catholics piously believe.³

¹ Iren., *Adv. Hær.*, I. xxvi. 2: 7⁰⁸⁸, III. xii. 12: *ib.*⁸⁰⁶; Tert., *Adv. Marc.*, i. 1: 2²⁴⁷, ix. 2: *ib.*³⁶³; *cf.* Plummer, who (*Gosp. acc. to St. Luke*, 1900, p. lxix.) shows Marcion's text was mutilated, not ours added to.

² *Encycl. Bibl.*, iii. 2960.

³ We are told, too, that if Jesus is to be *virginally* conceived, Gabriel accredits that greater miracle by quoting a lesser one (the conception of John by the aged Elizabeth).—There is here no difficulty.

But the Childhood narratives have positive claims to belief. Luke's preface (1¹⁻⁴) is a revelation of the writer's industry, common sense, and real feeling of a historian's duty and responsibility. He seeks "eye-witnesses from the beginning"; he claims to surpass, in order and accuracy, contemporary accounts; his object is the historical grounding of the doctrine preached. What were his authorities? Many have thought, Mary herself.¹ The whole of this part of Luke is written from her point of view (Matthew, from Joseph's). Delicacy of touch, intimacy of detail, are felt everywhere. Women (to whom Luke, the physician, will have had easier access) figure much in his pages, especially those holy persons who were much in Mary's company.² Then the events he records, though lost sight of in the "hidden" thirty years, must have had *some* publicity, at any rate. From these and other sources he may have gained his oral tradition.

Moreover, it is acknowledged that, so markedly *Hebraic* in their structure (as contrasted with the rest of his Gospel and the Acts) are the first three chapters of Luke, both linguistically and in local colour, so minutely accurate and prolific in details of place, person, cult,³ that it is practically clear he is here using an older Hebrew (or Aramaic) document.⁴ This brings us very close to the beginnings! Anyhow, that "faith working on history"

In the O.T., Yahweh constantly gives a marvellous sign to guarantee His future performance of a yet greater thing. And to this the Angel's concluding words look forward.—But, Zachary is punished for his "How shall I know?" Mary praised for her "How shall this be?" Surely contradictory?—No: Mary believes, accepts, asks the "how" of what is to be. Zachary hesitates: is he to believe? How feel sure?—One thing is clear: Mary never supposes that the promised child will be Joseph's (*cf.* Plummer, *ad loc.*).—Harnack's contention that this "conversation" (1^{34, 35}) takes Mary out of her rôle of "silence" may be neglected. Of course, it forces him to assign the *Magnificat* to Elizabeth. On this, see C.T.S. *The Magnificat: Its Author and Meaning*, by M. N.

¹ So W. Ramsay (*Was Christ born at Bethlehem?* 1898, p. 74: we cordially recommend this excellent book) and others.

² Sanday, *Hastings' Dict. Bibl.*, ii. 644.

³ Especially those connected with Zachary (L alone in the N.T. uses the technical word "course," 1⁸: he knows the angel stood "at the right" of the incense-altar), Anna, etc.

⁴ Plummer, *op. c.*, p. 45; Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, 1898, p. 31.

should have created this sober, profoundly "Palestinian" narrative¹ and the canticles in particular,² is a gratuitous hypothesis. What pious imagination did create, was a library of "apocryphal gospels." A single page of their insipid anecdotes, gross realisms, and vulgar wonder-lust convinces us that between them and our Gospels is the gulf between human and Divine.

As for the story in Matthew, its homogeneity is generally admitted—each part presupposes what precedes—and above all, its Palestinian colouring, its insistence on the fulfilment and applicability of prophecy, proclaim a Palestinian origin and audience. Certain details we shall examine below.³

We have therefore the right to conclude that Matthew and Luke are homogeneous, authentic documents, intrinsically intact. There is no evidence from tradition or even legend that they were added to or interpolated. On the contrary, we know that those who tampered with them did so to excise, not to expand, in favour of their own theories. And we urge that those who, by internal, literary criticism,

¹ Lepin, *Jésus Messie*, etc., 1906, p. 62; Rose, *S. Luc*, 1904, p. 18.

² On their "essentially Hebraic and pre-Christian character," together with their exclusive appropriateness to the occasion to which L assigns their utterance, see Durand, pp. 158-165, and the references in note 1 there. L may have cast the traditional sentiments into shape: scarcely, have adapted older Jewish, or even Christian, liturgical hymns. For the special question of the *Envolment*, and of the reputed pagan origins of this story, cf. *infra*, p. 17.

³ P. 19. It is said, we saw, that the phrase, "he knew her not until she had brought forth her [first-born: omitted by excellent MSS.; probably a gloss from L 27] son," implies that Mary lived afterwards with Joseph.—It need not do so (in Hebrew idiom, what is denied *until* an event is not thereby asserted as happening after it; cf. M 28²⁰, I Co 15²⁶, Ps 122³, already quoted by Jerome, 23¹⁸⁹); and *must* not be so interpreted, if it clash thus with other evidence.—"Her first-born son," L 27, is taken as implying that Mary had other children.—Again, it need not, and in these circumstances must not, be so taken. "First-born," to a Jew, connoted, not later births, but the privileges legally due to one who "opened the womb." L looks only to the *typical* value of the word as applied to the Eldest-born, the heir of Yahweh's promises. So Israel is constantly called, in O. T., Yahweh's first-born, without implying in the least that the other nations were His later born. That M and L freely speak of the "brethren" of Jesus, and L of Joseph as His father, e.g. 2⁴⁸, is psychologically true and no contradiction. So do the apocryphal Gospels, which insist violently on Mary's virginity.

affirm that they detect joints and rivets in the text, have no right to do so: only a conviction that the doctrine of the Virgin Birth *must* be a late development, while it is agreed that the Gospels are fairly early, can account for the discovery of reasons for the excision of those passages in which that doctrine is mentioned.

III

But Mark (whose Gospel is now considered by nearly all to be the earliest of the Synoptists, and indeed was probably treated by Matthew as the nucleus of his own work), Mark, we are told, knows nothing of the Virgin Birth, though he must have known it had it been believed in his day, and must have mentioned it had he known it. Paul ignores this dogma, and indeed virtually denies it, holding Jesus to be God's "Son" because *adopted* by the Father. John ignores it no less, explaining Christ's relation to the Father in terms of Alexandrian *Logos*-doctrine. Do not Matthew, then, and Luke clash with Mark, Paul, and John? Do we not see the legend, with our own eyes, springing up, late, and on Palestinian soil?

(i.) The Gospels reflect what was currently preached, not necessarily everything that was actually *believed*; for all will grant that the articles of the faith were not at first preached with equal emphasis or publicity. Mark reflects this earlier preaching with accuracy. The claim of Jesus to be Messiah, Teacher and Saviour of men; His ransoming death and victorious resurrection; His foundation of a Church, and the minimum of discipline conditioning membership—this is preached in the Acts, and Mark's Gospel supplies a more than sufficient historical background thereto. But none of this *presupposes*, or *flows from*, the Virgin Birth.¹

¹ It cannot too emphatically be recalled that Jesus is not Son of God because He is virgin-born; nor does pre-existence necessitate virgin birth. This misconception pervades and stultifies most of the theological argument of Lobstein's *Virgin Birth of Christ* (Eng. tr.), 1903, e.g.

Jesus Himself but gradually unfolded His doctrine, starting from Jewish beliefs which He was to transcend and transform. There was much His hearers "could not bear" at first. And sheer consideration for Mary's feelings will have precluded too public a preaching of this exquisitely delicate event in her lifetime.¹

(ii.) As for the "silence of John," and indeed his "substitution" of the Incarnation of the Logos for the Virgin Birth as explanation of the Divine Sonship of Jesus, we briefly say: (a) His doctrine does not exclude that of the Virgin Birth; indeed, (b) it in a sense involves it, for apparently the Churches of Asia, at anyrate, linked the Divinity and Virgin Birth more closely together than modern theology would.² And (c) John, who certainly knew Matthew and Luke, and wrote his Gospel almost entirely to assert the true doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, would surely have contradicted them had he thought them wrong.³

p. 88. A necessary connection between the Divinity and the Virgin Birth, he says (p. 89), "is the official theology in all Christian confessions." That is not so.

¹ Mk's phrase "son of Mary," 6^s, when M, L, and J freely speak of Joseph as "father" of Jesus, and his insistence on the title "Son of God," may hint that he (not having related the Birth) took special care to use unambiguous language (V. M'Nabb, O.P., "Mk's Witness to the V. Birth," *Journal Theol. Studies*, April 1907, p. 448). Anyhow, the incident in 3²¹⁻³¹ does not prove that his Mary is ignorant of the nature and destiny of her Son. It is argued that 3^{21, 31} go closely together: Mary joins with the relatives (? friends? neighbours?) who kept saying (or was it the crowd?) that Jesus was mad (? "beside himself," i.e. an enthusiast?). This interpretation is violent and against tradition. Mary's anxiety, and wonder, and gradual realization of the future (cf. L 2⁵⁰, "and they understood not") are no stumbling-block to us. "Christ's Mother, supernaturally informed in detail of all that was to happen in her Son's life, and assisting unmoved at its accomplishment, would be a character worthy only of the apocryphal gospels" (Durand, *op. c.*, 105). Cf. Vassall Phillips, *Mr Conybeare on Mk.* 3²¹, *Lk.* 11²⁷, Oxford, 1910.

² Gore, *Dissertations on the Incarnation*, 1896, p. 8.

³ A. Carr, *Expositor*, April 1907, p. 311; *Expos. Times*, 1907, xviii. 521. N.B. the very probable reading, 1¹³, "who not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God was born" (ἐγεννήθη: *natus est*), which excludes a human parentage for Christ. Authorities in Durand, *op. c.*, p. 107, n. 1; Tertull., *De Carne Chr.*, 19, 24: 2⁷⁸⁴⁻⁷⁹¹, is explicit.

(iii.) But does not Paul ignore, if not exclude, our dogma? He has been held to leave the human life of Christ so much in the shade, that it has been argued he knew nothing of it—even that no human life existed, and Christ was a “mythical person”! Yet his allusions to it are frequent, and he always presupposes it. And he too is absorbed in his message—faith, forgiveness, glorification in and through Christ, for Gentile as for Jew. This is “his” gospel, and it neither rests upon, nor leads to, the Virgin Birth.¹ Doubtless he maintains strongly² that Christ is Son of David “according to the flesh.” But he is son of David whom Jewish law recognises as such; and Jesus, born of the legal wife of Joseph, and not by adultery, is Joseph’s legal son, and heir of Joseph’s ancestor. Legal sonship satisfies the prophecies without excluding superior, Divine filiation. To this Jesus looks when He deprecates insistence on the Davidic descent (M 22⁴¹, Mk 12³⁵, L 20⁴¹; cf. Ro 1⁴): that is not His only, nor chief, prerogative.³ Nor can the two texts, Ac 13³³, Ro 1²⁻⁴, prove for a moment that Paul thought Jesus became God only at the Resurrection. The Son pre-exists the human life from eternity. The Divine filiation is of nature, not the result of baptism, miracles, transfiguration, resurrection, virginal con-

¹ We do not rely upon the expression “made of a woman,” Ga 4⁴, vividly though it recall I Co 11¹³ and Gen 2²³. It does perhaps imply birth from a *mother* (not merely *human* birth), while paternal generation would have suited P’s argument perhaps better could he have adduced it.—Nor will we argue that he conceives transmitted guilt as a *taint in the flesh*, to be got rid of only by a break in the paternal line. The wrong idea that Catholic doctrine (at any rate) so regards original sin, vitiates the rest of Lobstein’s argument (*op. c.*, p. 79) that miraculous birth was “a necessary condition of the Saviour’s sinlessness.” The substantial union of the Word with the humanity at once made the Person, Jesus, true God and Son of God, and made sin (and its consequent subtraction of supernatural grace, which is original sin) impossible in Him, quite independently of virgin birth.

² Ro 1³, 4¹³, Ga 3¹⁶, 2 Ti 2⁸, etc.; cf. Ac 2³⁰ (these are especially strong: Lobstein, *op. c.*, pp. 52, 53, thinks they *necessitate* human generation. But they are conventional formulæ).

³ On His so-called “rejection” of Davidic filiation, cf. Durand, pp. 118-122; Dalman, *op. c.*, p. 234.

ception.¹ Because of the filiation, these glories are His. Because at certain crises (baptism, etc.) the Sonship asserts itself and is recognized by God, "*this day have I begotten thee*" is quoted; and "it was *impossible*," St Peter had long ago preached (Ac 2²⁴), "that hell should hold Him who was Captain of Life" (3¹⁵; cf. He 2¹⁰).

All these writers were men who had known each other intimately—Luke, at any rate, the "beloved physician," the most "scientific" of the Evangelist historians, was the close companion, and in part biographer, of Paul. Each and all of them regarded it as his life's work to preach the true doctrine about Jesus Christ. The bonds of personal devotion which bound them to Him, bound them also to one another. Deep divergences of doctrine in such men are unbelievable. But so profoundly "individual" were their characters and outlooks—above all, so inexhaustibly rich, so many-sided, so infinitely communicative was their subject—that it must not be wondered at if their accounts are highly personal, and enlarge, illuminate, complete, though never contradict, each other.

That any of these documents should have ignored or denied the Virgin Birth is unthinkable, given the tradition of the Christian Church. They did not create this: they arose within it, according to and because of it. It is a vicious circle to say: Christian faith created the Childhood Gospels; and then: The first- and second-century tradition rests merely on "a few texts" in Matthew and Luke. The very earliest sub-Apostolic documents² are amazingly explicit. Ignatius, when he cried that Our Lord is "made truly of a virgin," is "born of Mary and God," knew surely that his doctrine was not at variance with his beloved master, John's! Once more, the Gospels *assume* the Christian faith in their readers.³

¹ Phil 2⁵⁻¹², Col 1¹⁵⁻²¹, 1 Co 10⁴, 15⁴⁵, Ga 4⁴, 2 Co 5²¹, etc. And C. T. S. *Relig. of Gk. Test.*, C. C. Martindale, pp. 19, 20.

² Ignatius (c. 110), *Ephes.* 19, and 5; *Smyrn.* 1: 5^{652, 660, 708}; Aristides (c. 125); Justin, 1 *Ap.*, 31: 6⁸⁷⁷, *Dial.*, c. 84, 100, *ib.* 673-709 (a magnificent parallel between the virgin Eve and the incorrupt, obedient virgin Mary, Eve's advocate); Irenæus, *Adv. Hær.*, i. 10. 1; iii. 19. 1: 7^{549, 987}, especially c. 21, *ib.* 945.

³ Ramsay, *op. c.*, p. 98, etc.

IV

We shall now consider a few points connected with the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which, it is urged, make against the virginity of Mary (the Genealogies, the Brethren of the Lord), or at least throw doubt upon the value of Matthew (the Magi, the Flight) or of Luke (the "Census") as historians at all.

(a) The Genealogies showing Christ's descent from David (M 1²⁻¹⁷, L 3²³⁻²⁸) agree in three names only: Joseph, Zorobabel, Salathiel.¹ Else, the discrepancy is complete. This perhaps is why Tatian omitted both lists in his *Diatessaron* (*supr.*, p. 5, n. 4). Origen (*c. Cels.*, ii. 32: 11⁸⁵²) recognises it as a frequent stumbling-block. How explain it?

Julianus Africanus (ap. Eus., *H.E.*, i. 7: 20⁹⁷) suggested (he owned he had no evidence) that Joseph was born of levirate marriage,² Jacob and Heli being brothers, one his legal, one his real father. But even so, we must assume that *they* had different fathers; and would not this uterine-levirate marriage (in itself of doubtful possibility) have to be conjectured anew to explain Salathiel, son of Jechonias (M) and of Neri (L), and yet again, if indeed Matthan (s. of Eleazer, M) is Matthat (s. of Levi, L)? Though Matthew's deliberate *omission* of steps in the descent might account for these differences.—Annius of Viterbo (*c.* 1490) suggested that L's genealogy was that of Mary.³ But this is against universal ancient belief: Jewish law disregarded maternal ancestry: when it was felt Mary should be of David's house, her pedigree was linked artificially with that of Joseph (Eus., *ib.*; *cf.* 4⁸⁸¹); while the *Proteuangelium Iacobi* makes her daughter of Joachim. Moreover, we should have to construe L3²³, "being the son (as was supposed, of Joseph, [but really]) of Heli" [using

¹ M's Matthan *may*=L's Matthat.—If Rhesa, L 3²⁷ (= "prince," and absent from the lists in M and 1 Paralip. 3), were really a title of Zorobabel, but treated by some earlier copyist whom L reproduces as a separate proper name, L would here fit with M and also with 1 Par.; for L's Iónas is the Hananiah of 1 Par 3¹⁹ (omitted by M), and his Iuda is M's Ab-iud=1 Par 3²⁴ Hodaviah (*cf.* Ezra 3⁹, 2⁴⁰; Neh. 11⁹; 1 Par 9⁷, 11, where the names interchange).

² One in which a childless widow marries her deceased husband's brother, his and her children being legally accounted to the first husband (Dt 25⁵).

³ Victorinus (*c.* 300) says M gives Mary's genealogy: 5³²⁴.

vids = son in regard of Joseph, = grandson in regard of Heli]; or else, "son of Joseph the son-in-law of Heli." But the text will not tolerate this violence.

What matters to the Evangelists, is the claim of Jesus to *Davidic rights*. That He was "descended from David" was tacitly assumed by contemporaries (M 22⁴¹⁻⁴⁶) and explicitly recognized by early preaching;¹ while the "Desposyni" (kindred of Christ—Symeon, son of Clopas His uncle, and two grandsons of Judas His brother) were in danger under Domitian as claiming royal, *because* Davidic, descent.² Our genealogies commend, but do not prove, this claim. It was currently discussed (Eus., *Ad Steph.*, iii. 2: *P.G.*, 22⁸⁹⁶) whether Messiah was to descend from David through Solomon (dead in idolatry; his house, in the person of Jechonias, rejected by God, Jer 22³⁰) or Nathan. Matthew and Luke satisfy, respectively, the two opinions; for while it is through Solomon that the *Davidic rights* descend to Joseph and his (legal) Son Jesus; through Nathan Christ's true *Davidic ancestry* may be traced. Matthew shows Jesus as legal heir of David; Luke, that He is his Son by physical descent.³ Matthew's genealogy is indeed highly conventional. It claims to consist of three groups of fourteen names.⁴ To obtain this, many names had to be omitted; thus Matthew's "begat" need never mean "was father of." Contrary to Jewish custom, he inserts women—Rahab, Tamar, Ruth, Bathsheba—perhaps to suggest that God

¹ Ro 1³, 2 Ti 2⁸, Ac 2³⁸, 13²⁸, etc.—M 15²², 20³⁰, 9²⁷, 21⁹ show that in popular opinion (1) Messiah descends from David, (2) Jesus is Messiah.

² See this charming story in Africanus, ap. Eus., *ib.*, and Hegesippus, *ib.*, iii. 19-32.

³ Durand, p. 201; Cornély, *Introd. N.T.*, p. 201, n. 6; F. C. Burkitt, *Evangelion da Mepharrashe*, Cambridge, 1904, ii. pp. 258-266. This theory is increasingly accepted. Clearly we have no space to discuss minor difficulties.

⁴ In the third, thirteen only occur, making it additionally likely that M used an existing, already slightly disfigured document. His symbolism may well allude to the numerical value (*fourteen*) of the (*three*) letters (דוד) of the name *David*.

excludes neither sinner nor stranger from His plan of mercy. Doctrine, then, dictates his scheme: Luke keeps closer to "history" in our sense. For while we may never become sure on what precise system these lists were drawn up, it is certain that, if the Evangelists composed them, they did so according to contemporary ideals as to the construction of genealogies;¹ and if they are quoting official documents, we may assume they do so "without attributing to them other authority than that of tradition or of the public registers which provided them."² Eusebius actually applies the "as was supposed" of L 3²³ to the whole list; Luke offers it simply as the popular opinion as to Jesus' ancestry!³

¹ On various O.T. systems for editing genealogies, cf. Prat, *Etudes*, 1901, lxxxvi. pp. 488-494; 1902, xciii. pp. 617-620.

² Cf. Durand, p. 207; Brucker, *Etudes*, 1903, xciv. p. 229; 1906, cix. p. 801.

³ M 1¹⁶ reads: "Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus," etc. [*N.B.* in Latin and Greek the same word stands for *to bear* and *to beget* (*gignere*, γεννᾶν)]. One group of MSS. accentuates the virgin-motherhood. ". . . Joseph, to whom being betrothed, the Virgin Mary bare," etc. ". . . Joseph, to whom was betrothed the Virgin Mary; but the Virgin Mary bare," etc. The Sinai-Syriac MS. (admirably edited 1894 by Lewis) astonishingly reads: "Jacob begat Joseph; Joseph, to whom was betrothed the Virgin Mary, begat Jesus," etc.—a heterodox text, yet containing, interpolated, the "virgin" additions. Finally, the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* (F. C. Conybeare, Oxford, 1898), a work of c. 430 discovered in 1898, is said to quote the heterodox phrase; thus: ". . . Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ. And Joseph begat Jesus who is called Christ."—But it is clear that the Jew Aquila's quotation stops at the first *Christ*. He resumes, sophistically: "And so (καὶ) often bears this meaning; and indeed in this very dialogue) Joseph," etc. The Christian Timothy immediately rebukes him: "Quote," he says, "correctly and in the right order"; he then himself quotes M 1¹⁶, substituting "to whom was betrothed the Virgin Mary" for "the husband of Mary," and finally, the ordinary text, save that "who was betrothed to Mary," and "the Christ the Son of God," replace "the husband of M.," and "who is called Christ." The dialogue, then, does not support the Sinai-Syriac, whose erratic reading may be due to (i.) an Ebionite "correction"; (ii.) a copyist's error, due to a mechanical continuation of the formula, And X begat Y; (iii.) the form in which the original document genuinely stood. No doubt an official record would put Joseph as father of Jesus. Notice that Sin.-Syr. leaves, e.g., verse 18 (which clearly asserts the Virgin Birth) intact,

(b) The relationship of the "brethren" of the Lord¹ cannot be defined with certainty. We summarize possible interpretations as briefly as possible, premising that the answer to this question can, of course, only affect the dogma of the *perpetual* virginity of Mary.

(i.) The "brethren" are children of Mary.²

(ii.) They were children of Joseph by a former marriage. So the *Gospel of James*, and that of *Peter* (end of second century); cf. Jerome, *Comm. in Mt.*, xii. 49⁸⁴, and perhaps Clement of Alexandria (9⁷⁸¹); Epiphanius, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and, hesitatingly, Origen and Hilary, and others perhaps, follow these. Jerome (*ib.*) says that they who so conjecture are following the dreams of the Apocryphas: he proclaims, too, the "virginity" of Joseph (*Adv. Helu.*, 19: 23²⁰³). It is unnecessary to follow the history of his opinion, which is dear to Catholic conviction.

(iii.) The "brethren" were cousins of Jesus.

There is no doubt that ἀδελφός, *frater*, and (what is of most importance), אח (ah) in Hebrew and Aramaic can quite easily mean "relative," not strictly *brother*

and that no one would dream of using this MS. to correct the *rest* of the Gospel text; why then insist that its unique reading must alone be right here? Read Durand, 74-82; Burkitt, *op. c.*, ii. 265; *Academy*, 17th Nov. 1894-24th June 1895.

¹ James, Jude, Joseph, Simeon. M 12⁴⁶, 13⁵⁵, Mk 3³¹, 6³, L 8²⁰, J 2¹², 7⁵, Ac 1¹⁴, 2 Co 9⁵: M and Mk speak too of His "sisters." Cf. Lightfoot, *Ep. to Gal.*, Dissert. II.; C. Harris, *Dict. of Christ and the Gospels*, 1906, i. 232; Corluy, *Etudes religieuses*, 1878, i. 22; Durand, 221-276 (excellent account). Fl. Josephus, *Ant. Jud.*, xx. 9. 1, Hegesippus and Julianus in Euseb., *H. E.*, ii. 23, i. 7, also refer to the kinsfolk of the Lord (*supr.*, p. 14). Their testimony relates to the years c. 62, 160, 210.

² Tertullian, already half-heretic, may have taught this (*De Carn. Christi*, 7, 23: 7⁷⁶⁶, 7⁹⁰). Jerome believed he did (cf. *Contr. Helu.*, 17: 23²⁰¹; d'Alès, *Théol. de Tert.*, 1905, p. 196). Lightfoot (p. 278) is against it. Origen (ap. Jer., *Hom. 7 in Luc.*, P. L., 7²³³) seems to refer to Tertullian, and possibly Hilary (*Comm. in Mt.*, i. 3-4: 9⁹²¹). But about 350, in Syria and Arabia, the denial of Mary's perpetual virginity became explicit: in 380 Helvidius, and a little later Jovinianus, both at Rome, provoked Jerome's vigorous attacks. Condemned at Milan, they were excommunicated by Siricius in 390. Bonosus of Myria was condemned a little later (*supr.*, pp. 2, 3).

(Gen 37¹⁶, 1 Par 23²¹, Lev 10⁴: Cicero, Tacitus: Euripides: it is quite common). Hegesippus, who calls James "the Lord's brother," calls Simeon "*another cousin*" of the Lord. The words are then convertible. Of Jude he says that "he was called the brother of the Lord according to the flesh." Probably (Durand, p. 229), at this very early period, that phrase was not so much *honorific*, as meant to distinguish between the several prominent disciples of the same name. Jerome (*c. Helu.*, 12-17) insists on this solution, alleging that (a) Mary had vowed virginity;¹ (b) that Mary was confided from the Cross to none of the "brethren," but to John. The brethren were not, then, her sons.² (c) Jesus is often called "Son of Mary": the brethren never; nor she their mother. Moreover, had Mary been mother, afterwards, of six or seven children (of whom several will have held high rank in the Church), and lived long as widow, the most perverse tradition could scarcely have succeeded in fixing on her, as uniquely distinctive title, that of *Virgin*. (So even Renan.) Finally, the "brethren" seem definitely *older* than Jesus.

(c) *The "Census."*—Luke says, 2¹⁻³, that an enrolment, imposed by the Emperor on the whole Empire,³ was carried out in Palestine by tribal and household enumeration. Thus Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem, and Jesus was born there. "This happened [I translate literally] as a first enrolment when Quirinius was in office in Syria." But we are told:—

The Roman census was based on property, not persons; and when Christ was born (B.C. 6-4: for His birth preceded

¹ So too Aug., Gregory of Nyssa, Ambrose; *cf.* Harris, *l.c.* i. 235.,

² So Jerome, Epiphanius, Chrysostom, Hilary, Ambrose, Siricius. To Lightfoot this argument seems conclusive: *l.c.*, p. 272.

³ "In the whole world" means this. The plan was quite in keeping with Augustus' ideals. He wished to assess the poll-tax fairly and accurately. That contemporary records do not mention it is unimportant: they are silent, too, about local enrolments known to us from inscriptions and papyri. Roman historians scorned the recurrent details of provincial administration.

Herod's death, 4 B.C.), there was no census in Palestine, nor was Publius Sulpicius Quirinius then in office. Sensus Saturninus governed Syria 9-6 B.C.; Quinctilius Varus, 6-4; 1 B.C.-4 A.D., Gaius, the Emperor's grandson, was legate, the intervening years being unaccounted for. But Quirinius was legate 6 A.D., and did indeed effect what Ac 5³⁷ calls "the enrolment." If Christ, then, was born 6-4 B.C., and Quirinius held office, and had the enrolment in 6 A.D., Luke is clearly wrong.

Even were he wrong in this detail of chronology, that scarcely should impair his general value as a historian. Still, mistake on this point were odd in one who so accurately had sought out the "origins" (I²; *supr.*, p. 7). But (i.) it is acknowledged (from inscriptions) that Quirinius *twice* held office in Syria. But when? May not Augustus, who associated Volumnius with Saturninus, have similarly added the notoriously energetic (so Tacitus) Quirinius to the indolent Varus in some semi-official (probably military) office?¹ Thus he may well have been "in office" in Syria 6-4 B.C., and (possibly) even have succeeded Varus in 4. (ii.) Recent discoveries² make it certain that family enrolments *besides* the land-assessments were held in Egypt every fourteen years. Enrolment papyri for A.D. 90, 104, etc. till 230 were unearthed; then for 76; then, 62; then, 20! Now Luke says the enrolment was *general*; and we know that Syria was enrolled in 34 A.D., also in 6: Clement of Alexandria, too (*Strom.*, i. 21, 147: 8⁸⁸⁵), implies that it had its periodical enrolments like those he knew in Egypt. Tertullian actually says (*Adv. Marc.*, iv. 19, *P.L.*, 2⁴⁰⁵) one happened under Saturninus (9-6),³ and that Christ was born during it. This is quite possible

¹ L says ἡγεμονεύοντος, "holding office," an untechnical word applied to various positions, and by Josephus, *Ant.*, XVI. ix. 1, to Volumnius. Justin, 1 *Apol.*, 34, calls Q. neither *legate* nor *proconsul*, but ἐπίτροπος, procurator.

² Read the romantic account of this triple simultaneous independent discovery by Kenyon (*Class. Rev.*, 1893, p. 110), Wilcken (*Hermes*, 1893, p. 203), Viereck (*Philologus*, 1893, p. 563), in Ramsay, *op. c.*, preface.

³ In fact, 8 B.C. is fourteen years before 6 A.D., as 34 A.D. is twenty-eight years after it.

if a clumsy household numbering in 8 B.C. was dragged out till 7-6 B.C.—as was practically inevitable owing to the chaotic political situation.¹ It is thus, *independently* of Luke, almost certain that there was such an enrolment in 6 B.C. in Palestine, the *first* of its sort,² Quirinius being in office.

The displacement of so many families is no difficulty. Only Palestinian Jews would be bound: the whole land could be crossed in three or four days: all devout Jews went thrice a year to Jerusalem.—Why does Mary accompany Joseph? We are not sure. Perhaps Joseph feared to leave her at such a crisis. Anyhow, in Syria, women, too, paid the poll-tax. How idle, then, is the theory that this story is forged to get the Holy Family from Nazareth (where L knew they lived) to Bethlehem (where the prophets said Messiah must be born): and alas for Mr Robertson, who says³ of household enumeration, "There was no such practice in the Roman world"!

(d) Of the story of the Magi we are told that its details are vague; its incidents improbable; that it clashes with Luke. It was invented to satisfy Messianic prophecies, or is the echo of pagan myth. Indeed, the date of its insertion into the Gospel is given. We deal with this first.

A Syriac document entitled "Concerning the Star: showing how and through what the Magi recognised the star," etc., says that Balaam's prophecy (Nu 24¹⁷) was written by Balak to Assyria, and there kept till the star appeared, and King Pir Shabūr sent the Magi to do homage to the Messiah. "And in the year 430 (118-119 A.D.) . . . this concern arose in [the minds of] men acquainted with the Holy Books, and through the pains of great men in various places this history was sought for and found, and written in the tongue of those who took this care" (W. Wright, *Journ. of Sacr. Lit.*, ix., x., 1866). Hence M 2¹⁻¹²,

¹ Ramsay, p. 174.

² The fourteen-years cycle being reckoned, Romanwise, from 23 B.C., the year of Augustus' reception of the Tribunician Power. In that year no enrolment will have occurred. 8 B.C. will therefore be the first. A.D. 6 is called "*the enrolment*," because Judea having just become a province, an enrolment consequently on purely Roman lines (local—not familial and tribal) made the Jews realize their subjection, and accordingly revolt. In 20 A.D. (end of the next cycle) Tiberius forbids interference with local customs.

³ *Christianity and Mythology*, 1900, p. 194.

based on this legend, was added to the Gospel in 119 A.D.—But : certainly *before that time* Ignatius of Antioch assumes the story to be universally popular (he rhetorically expands it *ad Eph.* xix., *P. G.*, 5⁶⁶²). So it is clear that the “Holy Books” are not the O.T. with its story of Balaam, but the Gospels with that of the Magi ; while what was first written in 118 A.D. is not the latter story, but the legend of Balaam’s message to Assyria.¹

Of the Magi (probably priests ; perhaps astrologers ; certainly heathen), as to number, nationality, rank, and later history, nothing is known. The star which they saw “at its rising”² has been identified (first by Kepler, 1605) with astronomical phenomena, *e.g.* the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn, B.C. 7. To pursue such investigations leads nowhere.³ No merely natural phenomenon could have seemed “to travel,” to “stand over” a house, etc., though the Magi may (conceivably) have heard from Jews of the Dispersion of the expected birth of a Deliverer, and have (independently) interpreted what they saw as a sign that this had happened. But their information will not have been based on Nu 24¹⁷ : still less was the whole story invented to satisfy that prediction ! The star in Numbers, as in Isaiah 60,⁴ uniformly means the Messiah himself : it was not his herald. The pseudo-Messiah Simeon actually called himself *Bar-Kokeba*, Son of the Star. And that Matthew, eager to quote O.T. prophecy whenever he can, should not here have cited Nu, Is, and Ps 72¹⁰, 68²⁹, had he seen their fulfilment in his story, is unthinkable.

V

We must now notice those writers who try to find the origin of the Gospel history in *mythology*, and shall, owing to the great popularity of this system, give it far more space than its intrinsic value merits. I am anxious to emphasize this. It is popular

¹ Cf. Allen, *Commentary on St. Matthew*, p. 22, 1907 ; Plummer, *idem.*, 1909, *ad loc.*

² “*In the east*” would probably need the plural *ἀνατολαῖς*.

³ Though see Ramsay, *op. c.*, pp. 215–218.

⁴ Cf., later, *Test. XII. Patr.*, Judah 24 (Gk.), etc.

polemic, not serious scholarship, that attaches real weight to these pagan "parallels." With the Magi, however, mythologists have no easy task. Cheyne¹ and others quote the stars which constantly herald the birth of great men.

Thus the Magi, on seeing Alexander's, declared that the destroyer of Asia was born; the star of the Julian family was famous (Verg., *Aen.*). The *Pushya*, on the horizon when the Buddha was born, was, however, a regular annual phenomenon (an asterism consisting of γ , δ , θ , of the constellation Cancer) and served to mark a date, not to glorify the infant.² The Magi may indeed have deduced a new birth from what they considered adequate evidence (*N.B.* "his star"); but Matthew draws no conclusion as to Christ's preternatural character from it; it merely guided the Magi to Bethlehem.³

But we hear: In 66 A.D. Tiridates, king of Parthia (Pliny, *H.N.*, xxx. 6, calls him a *magus*) came with magi (Dio. Cass., lxxiii. 1-7) to do homage to Nero, and went home "another way" (Suet., *Nero*, 13). Nero is anti-Christ: even as incidents of Christ's life attached themselves to Nero's (*e.g.* His expected return), so incidents of Nero's life accrued to Christ's.⁴

We prefer to admit a score of miracles rather than so grotesque an explanation. How, and why, were the stories so utterly transformed in detail? so Judaized in tone? so raised in religious value? why inserted in this peculiarly un-Hellenic part of the Gospel?⁵ And how dissociate the Magi from the

¹ *Bible Problems*, 1904.

² C. F. Aiken, *Dhamma of Gotama the Buddha*, Boston, 1900, p. 240.

³ Prof. R. Seydel (*Evangel v. Jesu*, 1882, p. 139) quotes a (post-Christian) tale that the god Brahman gave the unborn Buddha a dewdrop containing all power; the babe Buddha received perfumes from nymphs and palaces from princes; Mr Lillie adds (*Buddhism in Christendom*, 1887, p. 30; *cf.* Aiken, p. 243) that the young hero was escorted to a garden, eclipsing with his bodily brilliance the jewels that smothered him. Hence the tale of Magi with gifts!

J. M. Robertson, in *Christianity and Mythology*, p. 199, however, has to misinterpret the famous representation of the Magi (Northcote and Brownlow, *Roma Sotteranea*, 1879, ii. 258), universally recognized as Christian, as "surely Mithraic," "since there is really no other way of explaining the entrance of the Magi into the Christian legend."

⁴ *Cf.* Soltau, *Geburts-gesch. J.C.*, 1902, p. 73; Usener, *Encycl. Bibl.*, iii. 3351.

⁵ These considerations are in place whenever pagan myth is offered as origin for the Gospels.

organically connected Massacre and Flight, for which these pagan "sources" cannot be used? But other sources *are* suggested! Persecution of infant-heroes by jealous kings is a mere 'myth-motif'; Josephus should have mentioned the Massacre, had it occurred; hence no doubt the murdered Innocents but picture 'the disappearance of the stars at morning before the sun.'¹ Finally, Jesus is said to fly to Egypt because thither the giant Typhon drove the Olympian gods (Usener, *Encycl. Brit., l.c.*).

But in the same place Usener agrees that Egypt, with its large Jewish colonies, its numerous synagogues, its vicinity, etc., was exactly the natural place for a Palestinian Jew to fly to: Josephus, who has to relate Herod's murder of wife, mother-in-law, three sons, brother-in-law, uncle, and numbers of Pharisees, may be forgiven for omitting the obscure murder of a score (at most) of babies in a tiny town: the quaint solar parallel would be more perfect did the stars flee before an eclipse (for such, rather than sunrise, is the Child's flight)! Finally, because Herod's action is so natural, and naturally has its parallels in legend and popular tales, it need not *therefore* be mythical, or else we should have to accept for true only the unnatural events narrated in history.² As for the Loss and Finding in the Temple, one set of critics³ assigns the tale of the Buddha and the ploughing match as "pattern" (the baby hero, left under a tree by his nurses absorbed by the spectacle of a ploughing match, lapsed into meditation, and was found there, hours after, still sheltered by the stationary shadow of the Jamba; other versions put the incident quite late in the Buddha's life); while another (J. M. Robertson, *Chr. and Myth.*, p. 334, quoting Strabo, xvi. 2. 38, and Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris*, 14), says that the story of parents (*who had exposed their children*) going to Delphi to inquire of the oracle if the child yet lived, and there being met by the child himself (who had gone to inquire about the parent)

¹ J. M. Robertson (momentarily all for solar myth), *op. c.*, p. 333.

² Observe the Buddhist "prototype" (dating, moreover, from the sixth century A.D.), adduced by Seydel, *op. c.*, p. 142; Lillie, *Influence of Buddhism on Christianity*, 1893, p. 28; cf. Aiken, p. 244. King Bimbiskara is advised to send an army to crush the increasing power of his neighbour the Buddha, now a young man. He refuses, and is converted to Buddhism!

³ E. v. Bunsen, *The Angel Messiah of Buddhists, Essenes, and Christians*, 1880, p. 30; Seydel, p. 48; Lillie, *B. in Chr.*, p. 25; cf. Aiken, p. 245.

“supplies the source of the first part” of our story; while Plutarch mentions that in Egypt the cries of children at play in temple-courts were held for prophetic; and this accounts for the second part!—We prefer Luke’s history to modern myth.

Yet Matthew contradicts Luke?—Not at all. Grant that the Magi’s visit followed the Purification (not necessarily soon), and we need only assume that Luke did not *mix* his sources. For if the Magi-tale was current as in Matthew, Luke did not *insert* it into what he had learnt (probably) from Mary (*supr.*, p. 7), nor *repeat* it in a new form when the old was satisfactory. The Magi are no “doublet” of the Shepherds. The spirit of Matthew’s tale which shows the *universality* of Christ’s saving power is quite different from that which relates the homely incident so suited to the “Gospel of the Poor.”

We are constantly told, quite generally, that Jesus is but one among many virgin-born gods, and that His myth is discredited by theirs. Especially to the BUDDHA Sakyamuni are we pointed as origin of the Christian dogma.¹ Doubtless the tangled question of the dates of the Buddhist “scriptures” makes it difficult to criticize this briefly, but our references will supply details of evidence. We may say: The traditions of the Buddha’s birth are contradictory, and, especially the earlier, assign no “virginity” to his mother

¹ Bunsen, *op. c.*: “Zoroastrian magi invented an angel-messiah; the Buddha imported this into India, the Essenes into Palestine; Christ was an Essene; thus Buddhist legends reached and fastened on Him.” Sharply criticized by Kuenen, *Natural Religion*, etc., 1882.—R. Seydel, *op. c.*, maintains: A pre-Synoptic Jewish apocalyptic gospel existed (highly “Buddhized” by traditions journeying westwards by trade-routes opened up by Alexander), utilized by the Synoptists.—All imagination work, supposing an impossibly late date for the Gospels. Criticized by Oldenberg, Hardy, and even J. E. Carpenter (who patronizes the theory that Christianity borrowed from Buddhism), *XIXth Century*, viii. 971. A. Lillie, *op. cit.* These three books well discussed by C. F. Aiken, *op. c.* A. J. Edmunds, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels*, etc., London, 1904, is admirably considered by L. de la V. Poussin, *Revue Biblique*, 1906, iii. pp. 355-381. See, too, the latter’s *Bouddhisme*, Paris, 1909, p. 239 *sqq.*, and C.T.S. *Buddhism*, by the same.

Māyā. Later speculation held her to be virgin.¹ But note: for Buddhists, all *birth* is *rebirth*. A pre-existing being, a *ghandarva*, escaped from a previous life, is *re-incarnated*. Ordinary mortals are born where necessity dictates: superior beings—*e.g.* future Buddhas—can choose their moment, and their parents. This is why Māyā *dreams* that the future Buddha enters her side, *of his own accord*, as a six-tusked white elephant. She had lived some thirty-three years with her husband, and only after the conception of the Buddha resolves to abandon earthly love. The Buddha chose Māyā, because she was doomed to die ten months seven days afterwards: now, all mothers of Buddhas must die seven days after their child's birth, lest another child should occupy what had been a Buddha's shrine. There is in all this no hint of virgin birth. Indeed, feminine virginity was of little interest to Hindus or earlier Buddhists.² When the Mahāvastu does at last insist on Māyā's virginity, it is at the cost of the *birth*, for the Buddha is now represented as remaining in heaven, sending only a phantom self to be seemingly born of Māyā. Thus the birth is, at the first, marvellous, but not virgin. Once Māyā is virgin, the birth has ceased to be real.

The sage Asita, on the Buddha's birthday, sees "the gods of shining vesture forming the band of the thirty-two (gods)," [*not* "angels white-stoled": Edmunds] rejoicing. Ascending into the sky, he asks the reason. They answer: "The Buddha-to-be, the excellent jewel, the incomparable, is born in the world of men [leaving, that is, that of gods] to save [creatures] and to make them happy, in the village of the Sakyas," etc. Asita magically flies thither, and "because he knew the [32] signs" [*scz.* the webbed fingers, etc., which marked the child a superior being] exclaimed "with faith," "This is the unsurpassed, the excellent among men." He weeps, indignant that he will be dead before the child begins

¹ Jerome, *Adv. Iou.*, i. 42: 23²⁷³, on doubtful evidence calls the Buddha virgin-born. The extremely late writings of the Mongol Buddhists, and one other very late document, are our only sources here.

² Even the Lalitavistara (*possibly* as early as the Christian era) only asks how the Buddha could live without being defiled by (physical) contact with Māyā's womb. The answer is, that tents of jewels and perfumes enveloped him therein.

its work of salvation.—Graceful as are many incidents of this tale, not even in the words of the *devas* is a source found for Luke's narrative, though "peace on earth to men [objects] of [God's] goodwill" is not unlike the "utility and pleasantness" for which the Buddha is born.—The pre-existence of the Son is not like that of the Buddha in the Tusita heaven, which many odd incarnations (as king, pigeon, god, jackal, etc.) had preceded. Nor is Māyā's visit to a royal garden, surrounded with unimagined luxuries, like Mary's to Bethlehem, that we should say "both children were born when their mothers were on a journey." Such suggestions destroy the real charm of the Buddhist legends.¹

The god KRISHNA² is declared³ to have been born of a virgin Devakī. Now, not only is there a well-defined modern Indian movement to assimilate the legend of Krishna "the Black" to the life of Christ, while of the books which contain it "the earliest are at the very least several hundreds of years later than the composition of the Gospels,"⁴ but even in the Hindi version of that part of the documents which relates it we read that Devakī had already, before Krishna's conception, borne seven children to her husband Vasudeva. Considering too that Krishna had "eight specially beautiful wives of his own, besides over 16,000 others, and by them he had a family of 180,000 sons, all of whom finally killed one another, or were murdered by their father,"⁵ virginity would seem low enough in the esteem of the Black God's evangelists; and that Mr Vivian should include him among those "suffering Saviours" whose stories had been "for ages past similar in all essentials to the Gospel narratives" (p. 161) is amazing.

Of ADONIS, ATTIS, DIONYSUS, OSIRIS, MITHRA, CHRIST, Mr Robertson says⁶ "all six deities were born of a virgin." "In Persia, ZOROASTER was miraculously

¹ Seydel, pp. 295, 136; Bunsen, p. 34; Lillie, *Influence*, etc., p. 26; W. St. C. Tisdall, *Mythic Christs and the True*, 1909, p. 36.

² C.T.S. *Hinduism*, E. Hull, pp. 12, 14, 27.

³ P. Vivian, *The Churches and Modern Thought*, Watts, 1910, p. 121, etc.

⁴ Tisdall, *Mythic Christs*, p. 27.

⁵ Tisdall, p. 28.

⁶ *Short History of Christianity*, 1902, p. 63.

conceived."¹ "In Parsi mythology, SAOSHYANT is virgin-born."² We need but glance at these assertions.

Dionysus³ was the son of Zeus and a woman, Semele. While pregnant, she was shrivelled to death by the sight of her lover's glory. The unborn infant was snatched from her womb, stitched into Zeus's thigh, and ultimately "born" in circumstances which the poets easily made absurd.—Zoroaster⁴ is said in the Avesta (much of which is extremely late) to be the son of Pôrushaspa, a man whose genealogy was traced back for ten generations. His mother's name is not even mentioned. Even in the latest mythologizing documents (*cf.* Zarâtusht-Nâmah, *c.* A.D. 1278), the most we hear is that Pôrushaspa had drunk some haöma uice in which Zoroaster's *fravashi* (genius) had been placed. The conception was normal; the child was the third of five brothers.—Saoshyant and his two brothers, prophets to appear before the end of the world, are (literally) to be conceived of Zoroaster's seed—Saoshyant by a woman bathing in a lake.⁵ Here I cannot transcribe the details; still less, in the case of Attis and Adonis. Adonis was the son of Cinyras in one myth, of Phoenix in another, but (in the commonest version) of King Theias by his own daughter, Myrrha. The whole of this story, like Adonis' career and worship, is one of sexual abnormalities. Even more so is that of Attis, son of Nana and the androgynous monster Agdestis, itself offspring of Zeus and Earth.⁶ The cults of Adonis and Attis became bywords even among pagans for unbridled licence and hysterical perversities. In them, as in Krishna's, vice became of the essence of worship.

That MITHRA⁷ was virgin-born is argued by Mr J. M. Robertson as follows:⁸ Mithra is often coupled with the goddess Anâhita. But an inscription mentions "the tree of Zeus-Sabazios and Artemis-Anâhita." Therefore Mithra = Sabazios. But Strabo says Sabazios "is in a sense the son of the Mother" (*scil.* the Eastern goddess, Cybele, etc.). Therefore Mithra was son of a mother. But this mother must be

¹ P. Vivian, *op. c.*, p. 128.

² Robertson, *Pagan Christs*, p. 339.

³ C.T.S. *Relig. of Anc. Greece*, J. Huby, pp. 4, 21, etc.

⁴ C.T.S. *Relig. of Avesta*, A. Carnoy, *passim*.

⁵ Tisdall, p. 86.

⁶ Pausan., vii. 17. 5; Arnob., *Adv. Gent.*, v. 9. 4, *P.L.*, 5¹¹⁰⁰; Minuc. Felix, 21; on Adonis and Attis, C.T.S. *Relig. of Syria*, G. S. Hitchcock, pp. 10, 23; *of Imper. Rome*, C. C. Martindale, pp. 12, 14.

⁷ C.T.S. *Mithra*, C. C. Martindale.

⁸ *Pagan Christs*, 1903, p. 337 *sqq.* Every step of the argument might be disputed.

Anâhita, for not only is she goddess of fertilizing waters, and hence "must necessarily figure in her cultus as a mother," but Mithra, "who never appears . . . as a father." "would [therefore] *perforce rank as her son.*" Astounding logic! But all this apparatus to get Mithra born of a mother at all, has not yet shown she was virgin.—Simplicity itself! "It was further practically a matter of course that his divine mother should be styled Virgin, the precedents being uniform" (p. 337). Precedents? He quotes Agdestis, Attis, and Saoshyant (*supr.*, p. 26), and unexpectedly concludes: "As a result . . . we find Mithra figuring in the Christian Empire of the fourth and fifth centuries as supernaturally born of a Virgin Mother and of the Most High God" (p. 340). We find nothing of the sort. Mithra was invariably regarded as "rock-born," that is, sprung from the *Petra Genetrix*, "mother-rock," imaged by a conical stone (representing the sky-vault in which, or the mountains over which, the light-god first appears). Mithra had no human mother at all, virgin or otherwise.¹

It is idle to urge: Mithra was worshipped in crypts; but Mithra=Adonis, who was "born and worshipped in a cave" [surely not, and anyhow these identifications are ludicrously inexact]; Adonis=Tammuz, who was adored (Jerome says) in the unreclaimed Cave of Bethlehem; *therefore* Mithra was born in a cave.—He was not virgin-born, nor yet cave-born. If anywhere, the rock-birth occurred (as bas-reliefs suggest) under a tree by a river.²

¹ Mr Robertson oddly appeals to two savage myths, known to us third or fourth hand, in which Mithra is found born of a god and a woman, or (incestuously) of that god's own mother. Of these, M. Cumont (the leading authority on Mithraism) says: "Their character is radically different from the dogmas accepted by the Western believers in the Persian god." Reff. in *The Month*, Dec. 1908, p. 582 sq.

² Much has been made of a group of "adoring shepherds" sometimes sculptured near the rock-birth. They appear but rarely, and in no obvious connection with the birth. They are not clearly shepherds, and certainly do not adore. C.T.S. *Mithra*, p. 12. It is (with probability) conjectured that Mithra's birthday was kept on Dec. 25. He was indeed closely identified with the Sun, whose birthday was then kept. For Dec. 25, cf. C.T.S. *Rel. Imper. Rome*, p. 29; *Cath. Encycl.*, CHRISTMAS, Martindale, iii. 726.

OSIRIS¹ comes to us, like his pictures, enswathed in mummy-clothes of myth—in this case of contradictory, irreconcilable myths. Atûm, first of gods, but also Primeval Man, engenders from the substance of his own heart the Heliopolis Ennead of gods, one of whom was Osiris. Elsewhere, Osiris is son of Seb (Earth) and Nût (Sky), and rules as frankly human Pharaoh, married to his sister Isis. *He* certainly is not virgin-born. Isis herself, though in some very late syncretistic myths of great beauty she is virgin, is not so in relation with Osiris; indeed, one legend shows her losing that quality in her mother's womb by union with her twin-brother. As for her son Horus, he was conceived by the murdered Osiris (triumphantly "surviving himself"), but normally.² Nor were the Pharaohs "virgin-born." True, they first have gods for ancestors; then, God for father; then, *are* gods. But notice: the god is explicitly said to be incarnate in the Pharaoh's *human* father. Each reigning Pharaoh is the god's physical instrument in the conception of the next.³ In conscious imitation of this, Alexander the Great and others—often deliberately, to gain influence in an Egypt accustomed to have gods' sons for governors—claimed as ancestor or sire Zeus or Apollo. Popular romance and court flattery elaborated the legend, which few if any took seriously. Nor did anyone believe the

¹ C.T.S. *Relig. Anc. Egypt*, A. Mallon, pp. 15, 30.

² *La relig. de l'anc. Egypte*, Virey, Beauchesne, 1910, p. 96; Budge, *Book of the Dead*, Introd., pp. cxxxiv. and lxxx. All the Osiris myths focus in the idea of life victorious over death: new wheat springs from the rotting grain; dawn from the dead day. But Isis, as Earth fertilized by the flooding Nile, affords no hint of virginity. Except (perhaps) in art, her worship has not affected ours, though Prof. Petrie—*num talia talis?*—asserts "that it became the popular devotion of Italy; and after a change of name due to the growth of Christianity, she has continued to receive the adoration of a large part of Europe down to the present day as the Madonna" (*Relig. Anc. Egypt*, 1906, p. 44, cf. 91).

³ Inscriptions at Deir-el-Bahari and Lâqsur make this certain. Virey, pp. 95-98; Moret, *Caractère relig. de la royauté pharaonique*, pp. 50-52, there quoted.

stories about Apollo, father of Plato, or Proteus, of Apollonius. They were literary imitations of the old myths which made Zeus visit Alcmena in the shape of her husband, or Europa, Leda, Danaë as bull, swan, or golden shower, thereby glorifying (and explaining) their heroic offspring, Herakles, Perseus, etc. There is no question here of virginity.¹ From this point of view it is a pity that some Fathers (Origen, Jerome, Justin) use these tales as an *argumentum ad hominem* against pagan critics of the miraculous conception of Christ. "You," they argue, "account for heroes by saying: A God was their sire. Why then cavil if we teach that a greater far than heroes was Son of God?" But that Justin, *e.g.*, had no *faith* in the pagan virgin births is clear from the words he puts in the mouth of Trypho (*supr.*, p. 2). Even he saw that the *difference* between the stories was profound. We may add that the title *Divi Filius*, Ἰὸς Θεοῦ, "Son of God," taken by emperors, in no sense denies human parentage, still less claims virgin birth (C.T.S. *Imper. Rome*, p. 4; *King-Worship*, C. C. Lattey, p. 31).

Indeed, the stories which approach nearest to a suggestion of the Virgin Birth—where maid becomes mother by treading in a giant's footsteps, eating a fruit, by the action of sunbeams, or (as did Chimalma, mother of Quetzalcoatl) by the god's breath—nearly all belong to levels of civilization where no one will look for the *origin* (at any rate) of the Gospel story. They are folklore so inferior even to myth, that *interaction, causal influence*, is unthinkable. They have been used² as basis of a theory that primitive savages were ignorant of the "true cause of offspring," an ignorance which resulted in tales of virgin birth, some still surviving in a purified form. But (i.) it is quite unlikely that the Australian savages (who alone can be quoted) are really so ignorant of the cause of birth as the authors suppose—the exist-

¹ Farnell, *Cults of Gk. States*, ii. 447, and others make it clear that the name *Parthenos* itself need not imply virginity. It often means just "unmarried," and is compatible with great licence.

² Cases accumulated in E. S. Hartland, *Legend of Perseus*, 1894 (a chaos simplified by "P. Saintyves," *Vièrges mères et naissances miraculeuses*, 1908), and argued from by Dr. Frazer, *Adonis, Attis, and Osiris*, 1907, ii. 169.

ence among savages of complicated marriage tabus and legislation, and of widespread sex-worships, is quite against such (antecedently unlikely) ignorance—but (ii.) there is no sort of reason for supposing such ignorance to have been *universal*, especially as “primitive” savages are often probably “degenerates,” not just embarking on a career of improvement.¹

To sum up. In nearly all these cases (and there are scores of others) the birth may be *preternatural*, but is not *virgin*. In important examples, it remains obscure when the traditions embodying the analogies are to be dated (Buddha); or borrowing from Christianity is actually certain (Krishna). As a rule the legend is attached to a mythical, not historic, person (Herakles, Perseus), or was never taken seriously (Plato, Alexander, Augustus). The whole setting is usually frivolous, often obscene. The Gospels are profoundly Judaic, and uncoloured by pagan, especially Hellenic, tradition. *Conscious* adaptation of myth by their writers is a grotesque supposition, neglected by reputable scholarship; there was no time for an *unconscious* deformation of historical events in view of the early date now generally admitted for the composition of the Gospels.²

Dr. Abbott (*Encycl. Bibl.*, ii. 1778) seeks the origin of our tradition in Philo's allegorical treatment of certain O.T. stories—thus: Yahweh is the true father, *e.g.* of Isaac, because Isaac = “laughter,” and “God sows and begets happiness in souls.” (The ref. to Philo are i. 131, 147, 215, 273, 598, ed. Mangey.) But even if Philo sometimes “allegorized” the Patriarchs, he never implies their *historical* virgin birth, still less could he foster an opinion that the Messiah (whose rôle he almost

¹ A. H. Sayce, *Relig. of Anc. Egypt and Babylon*, 1902, p. 17. Instances of “degeneration,” C.T.S. *Lectures on Hist. Relig.*, vols. i. and ii., *Relig. of Hindus, Early Rome, Buddha*, etc., etc.

² Harnack vigorously says: “The conjecture of Usener, that the idea of the birth from a virgin is a heathen myth which was received by the Christians, contradicts the entire earliest development of Christian tradition, which is free from heathen myths so far [he adds] as these had not already been received by wide circles of Jews, . . . which in the case of that idea is not demonstrable.” [Usener himself says (*Encycl. Bibl.*, ii. 3350): “The idea is quite foreign to Judaism.”] *Hist. of Dogma*, Engl. tr., i., 1897, p. 100, 1; cf. Chase, *Cambridge Theol. Essays*, ed. H. B. Swete, 1905, p. 412: “The solution of Prof. Usener is directly at variance with the primary conditions of the problem.”

obliterates) was to be virgin-born;¹ and anyhow Alexandrian (Philonic) Judaism was very different from the purely Palestinian religion of the Gospels.²

Finally, Harnack himself (*cf.* note 2, p. 30) argues that the source of our belief was but a misinterpretation of Is. 7¹⁴ (*Ecce uirgo concipiet*, etc., Vulgate). It is impossible here to discuss the true interpretation of the text. The Fathers with practical unanimity saw in it from the first a prophecy of the actual event, but it could only support, not generate, a belief or story. For, once more, virgin birth was not an idea to which the Jewish mind was accustomed. Whatever floating myths or confused traditions or indistinct expectations may have at times occupied it, we cannot suppose that a sudden, mysterious misinterpretation of a single and not well-known text should have been so general and potent as to impose, as true, a belief such as the virgin birth of Jesus upon His almost immediate disciples.

The Gospels, then, as we have them teach that Jesus was born of a Virgin. So too the early Church believed. Either, then, the belief was founded upon the Gospels, or the Gospels were the literary expression of the belief. The dogma must be assailed, if the former be the case, by an attack upon the value of the Gospel narrative; if the latter, by discrediting the value of the belief. We saw (i.) that there is no external or

¹ Whether a virgin-mother ever, or *still*, appeared on a purely Jewish horizon remains doubtful. Trypho, we saw (p. 2), practically denies it. That Enoch, 62⁵, 69²⁹, calls the Messiah *son of the woman* does not help. Could we be sure that the LXX. meant their *παρθένος* (virgin) (later modified by Theodotion and Aquila to *νεάνις*, "young woman") in Is. 7¹⁴ to be taken in its complete sense, and that the virgin as virgin was to bear, the argument for a Jewish virgin-mother tradition would be stronger; but *cf.* Condamin, *Isaïe*, p. 67; Lagrange, *Messianisme*, p. 222 *sqq.*

² Lobstein, *op. c.*, p. 68, maintains the gradual adornment of Christ's child-life, like that of Moses, Samuel, etc. This is far more plausible; but is yet (i.) unprovable, (ii.) improbable: even had the Childhood been "embroidered," *virgin birth* would not have been chosen as a *motif*. Except among the Essenes, the unmarried state was not esteemed by the Jews.

internal evidence that the Gospels are late, or patchwork, or interpolated as regards the Childhood-story. Their mutilation can only be attempted in obedience to a *a priori* conviction that miracle is impossible. Incriminated episodes, like that of the *Magi*, have no evidence against them ; or even, like that of the enrolment, are amazingly accredited by modern research, and reflect honourably upon the Evangelist as historian. Finally, neither is Matthew in conflict with Luke, nor yet with the "silence" of Mark, nor the doctrine of Paul or John : (ii.) while one group of critics, rejecting as absurd the hypothesis that the Gospels are indebted to pagan sources for their narratives, seeks their origins in Jewish prophecy or myth or allegory, another group, insisting that a virgin birth was wholly alien to Jewish expectation or ambition, assigns Indian, Persian, Greek, nay "savage" cult and fancy as the fountain-head of the Christian dogma.

We, while acknowledging that the serene and universal faith of the early Church makes the background of the Gospels, and that they must be interpreted according to it, and could not have denied it without being detected and flung aside, yet realise that those Gospels were written, or at least reproduce a doctrine existing long before alien influences of whatever sort could enter to violate the primitive traditions, and even memories, of the early disciples. Not the conflicting, apocryphal forecasts of the Messiah, not perverse misreadings of the sacred books, not the unclean or grotesque or (at best) romantic and graceful legends of pagandom could create the simple, pure, and fragrant Gospel of the Childhood, so purely Jewish and of its own time, yet so potent to reach the love of the children of our distant day ; nor need the older and more learned readers of that record hesitate still to refresh their eyes with the gentle mysteries of Bethlehem, or fear for the honour of the Virgin whom all generations shall name blessed.