

us on both sides take for our motto the words—*ἀληθεύοντες ἐν ἀγάπῃ* (Eph. iv. 15).”

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P.S.—It has been pointed out to me (and I am thankful for it) that it might not unnaturally be inferred from my note on p. 341 that Mr. Tomlinson claims only four editions in support of the comma. This would be a great mistake. I desire, therefore, by way of correction, to state that Mr. Tomlinson asserts: “It [the comma] is found in every Prayer-Book which has any pretension to an official character.” Again he says: “Pages might be filled with a list of the editions in which the true reading was retained” (p. 6).

I sincerely regret having, however unintentionally, given occasion to misunderstanding.

I must add that an earlier edition of Parsell (1706), which I did not know of, has “*exhibitum nobis*,” as stated in the *Guardian*, April 15, 1903, p. 531.

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#### ART. IV.—OUR LORD'S VIRGIN BIRTH AND THE CRITICISM OF TO-DAY.—IV.

**I**N the further investigation of our subject we may suppose that our Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke in their canonical form are to be placed, as Schmiedel would place them, in the first or second decade of the second century. But even so, there is evidence that the belief in the Virgin birth must have already gained wide currency. Reference has already been made to the remarkable testimony of St. Ignatius. If we may reasonably place his martyrdom about 110 A.D., and if we remember that he had been the Bishop of the great Church of Antioch, and that on his way to his death he addresses various Churches of Asia and the Church in Rome itself, that he writes a letter to St. Polycarp, in which he explains that he had been suddenly prevented from writing to all the Churches, we shall better understand with what extent of knowledge and authority he could write such words as these: “And the virginity of Mary and her child-bearing escaped the notice of the princes of this world, and likewise also the death of the Lord—those mysteries to be cried aloud—the which were wrought in the silence of God” (“Ephesians,” xix.). So, again, in addressing the Smyrnæans, he gives glory that they are fully persuaded as touching our Lord that He is truly born of a Virgin, and truly nailed up in the flesh for our sakes under Pontius Pilate and Herod

Much stress has been laid upon the fact that the Ebionites of the second century denied the Virgin birth. But we must remember that the name "Ebionites" does not meet us at all before the time of St. Irenæus; and that Origen in two places ("Contra Celsum," v. 61, and "Com. Matt.," xvi. 12) refers to two kinds of Ebionites, one of which acknowledged that Jesus was born of a Virgin, while the other did not accept this belief. No doubt there are statements in Justin Martyr which plainly show that a certain number of Christians in his day held with this latter kind of Ebionite, referred to by Origen.<sup>1</sup> But the context in which Justin places his statements enables us to see, not only that Jewish Christians would have had a special difficulty with regard to the acceptance of the Lord's Virgin birth, since the Jews believed that the Messiah was to be born "a man of men" (as Justin points out in his "Dialogue with Trypho"), but that Justin himself is stating the belief of a minority in the Church—a belief which he for his own part strongly repudiates: "For there are some, I said, of our number who admit that He is Christ, while holding Him to be a man of men, with whom I do not agree; nor would I, even though most of those who have the same opinions as myself should say so, since we were enjoined by Christ Himself to put no faith in human doctrines, but those proclaimed by the blessed prophets and taught by Himself" ("Dial. cum Tryphone," 48). Professor Schmiedel ("Encycl. Biblica," Art. "Mary," iii., 2963) bids us remember that we do not hear of the Ebionites as a "sect" before the end of the second century; and he quotes the above passage in Justin, or, rather, a few words of it, in proof that the Ebionites represented the continuation of one of the earliest tendencies of Christianity. But that tendency was predominantly a Jewish tendency, as Irenæus, in his description of the Ebionites, abundantly testifies ("Against Heresies," i. 26, 2); and that such a tendency might easily be associated with a difficulty in accepting the Virgin birth we have already

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<sup>1</sup> In his "History of Early Christianity," p. 207 *et seq.*, Mr. Pullan has fully discussed Dr. Hort's statement that the Ebionites and Nazarenes were only one sect ("Judaistic Christianity," p. 197, and to the same effect Dr. Bright, "Some Aspects of Primitive Church Life," p. 259). But if we prefer Dr. Hort's account, and see in the name Nazarene a description of the Jewish Christians of Syria, "either taken or inherited from the designation of the Apostolic Age," it does not follow that we should regard these people as representing the full Catholic tradition about our Lord's birth and person. Epiphanius in his day is very hesitating in his language, and apparently cannot say whether they denied the Virgin birth or not, whilst in their Christology there is also considerable uncertainty, although they appear to have held what may be fairly called "the somewhat shrunken orthodoxy" of the *Didache*.

seen. We do not, however, find that Dr. Schmiedel quotes the strong condemnation which Justin Martyr passes, nor does he mention that the Church-writers mentioned above show that the belief in the Virgin birth was not only of early date, but of wide acceptance—an acceptance shared amongst others by the Churches of Syria and Palestine. And whatever may have been their origin, Justin Martyr's "some of our number" certainly did not represent the belief of the Catholic Church.

The mention of St. Irenæus reminds us how his writings supply us with a further remarkable proof of the position which must have been assigned to the belief in the Virgin birth, long before the close of the second century and in Churches far and wide.<sup>1</sup> In the opening of his great work ("Against Heresies," i. 10) he speaks of the faith which the Church had received from the Apostles and their disciples: in one God, the Father Almighty; in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Ghost, Who by the prophets declared the birth of a Virgin, and the Passion and Resurrection and bodily Ascension. After reciting these and other articles of the Faith, Irenæus proceeds to remark that, "while the languages of the world differ, the tenor of the tradition is one and the same; and neither have the Churches situated in the regions of Germany believed otherwise, nor do they hold any other tradition, neither in the parts of Spain, nor among the Celts, nor in the East, nor in Egypt, nor in Libya, nor those which are situate in the middle parts of the world." Again, in a later part of his work (iii. 4) he speaks of the tradition which the Apostles had delivered to those whom they entrusted with the Churches, which accept the articles of the Faith mentioned above, and believe in One God, the Framer of heaven and earth and of all things that are in them, by Christ Jesus the Son of God, "Who for His surpassing love's sake towards His creatures submitted to the birth which was to be of the Virgin."<sup>2</sup>

It may be noted in passing that the latest date to which we can refer the work of St. Irenæus (190 A.D.) is also the same date to which Professor Schmiedel has lately assigned the

<sup>1</sup> See Wohlenberg, "Geboren von der Jungfrau Maria," p. 40.

<sup>2</sup> The Bishop of Worcester ("Dissertations," p. 44), in referring to the testimony of St. Irenæus, points out what special stress he lays upon the representation of two churches—that of Rome, and that of the Church of St. Polycarp, Smyrna—who taught those things which he had learned from the Apostles. St. Irenæus dwells upon this testimony just before he mentions the various articles of the Creed, iii. 3, and he adds: "Yea, and the Church in Ephesus, having had both Paul for its founder and John to abide among them, is a true witness of the Apostles' tradition."

remarkable epitaph of Avircius of Hieropolis, the rediscovery of which we owe to Professor Ramsay.<sup>1</sup> From this epitaph we gain an invaluable picture of Church life and belief in the second century, and Ramsay strongly maintains that in one striking expression, where our Lord is spoken of as "the Fish from the fountain, mighty, pure, which a spotless Virgin grasped," we have a reference to His conception by a spotless Virgin. It must, however, be admitted that Bishop Lightfoot inclines to refer the Virgin to the Church ("Ignatius," i. 481), whilst Schmiedel apparently regards the expression as ambiguous ("Encycl. Biblica," Art. "Gospels," ii., 1778). But if we prefer Professor Ramsay's interpretation, its significance is very great, since Avircius, no less than Irenæus, claims to describe the faith as it was held everywhere, in many and different lands; Avircius had travelled east and west, and wherever he goes he finds fellow-worshippers in the same Church, and fellow-believers in the same faith. But without pressing this point of interpretation, we may add to St. Irenæus the great names of Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria, although in the latter the references are few. And to these, again, we may add the testimony of writers so varied as Origen, Hippolytus, Cyprian, Lactantius, to say nothing of others.

Much has been made of the fact that the original Nicene Creed as accepted by the Council contained no allusion to the Virgin birth, and we are significantly told that the time may come when the original Creed of Nicæa may gain a hearing. But let us look into the matter for a moment. The Bishop who occupied the first seat at the Council of Nicæa, on the right of the Emperor, was Eusebius of Cæsarea; he delivered the opening address, and his Creed, the Creed of the Church of Cæsarea, was first presented to the Council. But that Creed, so it is objected, made no mention of the Virgin birth. Yes; but does it follow that Eusebius denied it? We shall make a great mistake if we jump at any such conclusion. The same Bishop, in writing against Marcellus within a few years of the Council, on the theology of the Church,<sup>2</sup> speaks in one and the same sentence of the birth from the holy Virgin, of the becoming Man, of the Suffering. Does not the true explanation lie in the fact that the Virgin birth was supposed—as it has been well said—to be *involved in* any statement of the Incarnation? It will be noticed that in the

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<sup>1</sup> *Expositor*, ix., pp. 264-272, Third Series; and Bishop Lightfoot's account, *Expositor*, i., p. 5, Third Series.

<sup>2</sup> The passage is quoted by the Bishop of Worcester in a note on p. 42, "Dissertations."

passage quoted from Eusebius' own writings the allusion is quite incidental; it evidently indicates, from its terms, a truth well known, and it places the Virgin birth and the Passion on the same level as historical facts. But may we not fairly ask, Why should the additional statement "And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary" present a stumbling-block to those who acknowledge that they are prepared to accept the Nicene Creed as it was adopted by the Council? To believe that Jesus Christ, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, was incarnate and was made Man, involves a belief in a miracle so stupendous, so transcending all other facts in the world's history, that the details connected with it can scarcely surprise us on the ground that they, too, are in their nature unique. Whatever difficulty these details may present, a still greater difficulty faces us in any attempt to account for their origin and their acceptance, apart from their truth.<sup>1</sup> It is quite beside the mark to maintain that the expression "Born of the Virgin Mary" is only symbolical of our Lord's unique purity and sinlessness (so apparently Lobstein and other modern writers). If this had been their purpose, we may ask, why should such words have been introduced at all? One might have supposed that it would have been easier and more intelligible, if we may judge from the standpoint of our opponents, to have said simply: "Who knew no sin" (2 Cor. v. 21), and we should then have had, at all events, an article of the Creed which rested upon an indisputable foundation, so far as the New Testament is concerned.

Professor Schmiedel tells us that the Church attached the highest value to the doctrine of the Virgin birth. In one direction a value for this doctrine was sought in connecting it with the sinlessness of Jesus, although it was not until the doctrine of original sin had been fully developed that the theory of the Virgin birth became important with regard to Him (Art. "Mary," *u.s.*, 2964). But if, according to Schmiedel, this important connection existed between the assertion of original sin on the one hand, and the doctrine of a Virgin birth on the other, and if we remember that no

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<sup>1</sup> In "*Contentio Veritatis*," p. 88, we read: "We should not now expect *a priori* that the Incarnate Logos would be born without a human father"; but if the belief in the Virgin birth comes to us, as we maintain, from Jewish circles, there was no *a priori* expectation to this effect, and the only prophecy which could be quoted in support of it was not referred at the time of the Advent to the Messiah at all." See also Dr. Chase's criticism, "Supernatural Element in our Lord's earthly Life," p. 23.

one has asserted more emphatically than St. Paul the doctrine of original sin (although he does not use the precise phrase) and the implication of all men in Adam's fall, the strange thing would have been, as Schmiedel's words help to show us, if the Apostle had *not* regarded the birth of the one Sinless Man, as differing in some way from the ordinary propagation of a sinful race. Whilst, then, it is quite true that we cannot *prove* that the Virgin birth was known to St. Paul, it is none the less true that such a mode of birth falls in, and that, too, in a remarkable manner, with the Apostle's own language, and with the language of the early Church—*e.g.*, that of St. Irenæus ("Against Heresies," iii. 22; v. 1, 19). In modern days this connection between sinlessness and the birth of a virgin has been often emphasized, but in a different manner from that remarked upon by Dr. Schmiedel, who seems to think that the only logical outcome is the Roman doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. Thus, Dr. Illingworth ("Divine Immanence," p. 95), after pointing out that the real ground upon which the Virgin birth is rejected may be found in the *a priori* one of its intrinsic improbability, and that the tradition of the Early Church was that only by such an event could the sinful entail be broken, adds, "and that, too, at a time when the relation of body and soul was conceived as far less intimate than we now know it to be." "But," he continues, "with our modern knowledge of their mutual interdependence, it is doubly impossible to conceive that natural human generation should issue in anything else than a contaminated personality. It may be urged that we have no reason to think otherwise, even in the case of a virgin birth. But the cases are widely different. For of natural generation we have positive knowledge, based on universal experience, that it does as a fact issue in a sinful person. Whereas of virgin birth we have no positive knowledge; it is wholly outside our experience; we can only conjecture what its consequences would be. And in the absence of all knowledge, it is a perfectly conceivable conjecture that a mode of birth from which an essential factor of ordinary heredity is absent should involve independence from hereditary taint."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> With these remarks we may compare those of Dr. Sanday, "The Meaning of the Virgin Birth," in Art. "Jesus Christ," Hastings' B.D., vol. ii., p. 646, also of Mr. Ottley, "Incarnation," in the same volume, p. 460, and those of the Bishop of Worcester, "Dissertations," p. 66, and "Romans," i., p. 200. To these references may be added, amongst English writers, Mr. Garvie's thoughtful paper on "The Virgin Birth," *Expositor*, February, 1902. In his book on "The Ritschlian Theology," pp. 208, 281, 290, Mr. Garvie has given us some interesting remarks on the attitude of Ritschl and Hermann towards the fact in question.

This is a very different thing, of course, from any notion that sexual intercourse is in itself sinful—a notion which in Dr. Schmiedel's opinion was at work in the elaboration of the theory of the Virgin birth, and in support of which he quotes Rev. xiv. 4.

But if this passage exalts virginity, there are two considerations to be noted: First, that such teaching is insisted upon to counterbalance, as it were, the sensuality and carnal sins which had eaten into the life of more than one of the Churches; and, secondly, that in Rev. xxi., xxii., the holy institution of marriage receives both recognition and consecration from the imagery employed (see "Century Bible," *in loco*).

One other reason for the value attached by the Church to the doctrine in question may be best seen, in Schmiedel's judgment, in such a writer as Justin Martyr. This writer we are told, is concerned to show the points of comparison between all that was alleged of so-called sons of Zeus and Jesus, the true Son of God, and he argues from these comparisons that there is so much common ground between Christian and heathen belief. "Such arguments," urges Schmiedel, "show us to what a level Jesus can be (not raised, but) lowered by the doctrine of the Virgin birth." It is a strange conclusion to deduce from any Christian writer, but it is arrived at by insisting upon points of *comparison* to the almost entire exclusion of points of *contrast*; by forgetfulness of the fact that Justin is keenly alive to, whilst he strongly condemns, the grossness and license of the heathen mythology.

But quite apart from these and similar criticisms, the object of the preceding pages has been to insist upon the evidence for the Virgin birth, and to show that no reasonable account can be given for a belief in that doctrine apart from its historical truth. It is not a pleasant or an encouraging task to look back upon chapters in the history of the Church, wherein men have endeavoured to transform the facts of the Creed into mere symbols for the expression of universal religious ideas.<sup>1</sup> From this perversion, which is no new danger and no new discovery, our English Prayer-Book may guard and protect us. In the Collect for Christmas Day we address God, Whose only-begotten has taken our nature upon Him, and Who was born of a pure Virgin. Here we have the statement of an historical fact; yet it is no dead fact, but a fact possessing "the power of an endless life": "Grant that we, being regenerate and made Thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by Thy Holy Spirit." This is the spiritual truth. The historical fact is not forgotten, but it is the basis,

<sup>1</sup> See, *e.g.*, the remarks of Hagenbach, "Kirchengeschichte," ii., p. 472.

not the symbol, of the spiritual truth. It is not forgotten any more than it was in the days of St. Ignatius, who could place our Lord's Virgin birth as a fact side by side with His death, and could speak in the same chapter of the same letter ("Ephesians," xix.) of the results of that child-bearing of Mary: "From that time forward the ignorance of wickedness vanished away, when God appeared in the likeness of men unto newness of everlasting life."

To the historical fact of the Virgin birth the English Prayer-Book bears witness, not only in our Christmas Collect, but in the morning Hymn of Praise—the triumph song of the Western Church—in which for century after century her children have rejoiced and been glad. The same testimony is again recorded in our most solemn Service of Thanksgiving, in Creed, and in Preface—one of the two Prefaces which first found a place in our first Book of Common Prayer. We are not asked to accept the Virgin birth—at least primarily—as a spiritual or doctrinal truth, although undoubtedly there is a sense in which it becomes so, but as an historical fact; and that fact our Creeds, our Articles, and our Prayer-Book proclaim with no uncertain sound.

Translate the facts of the Creed into terms of modern life if you please—in one sense they will bear it, for they form "a creed for every time and age"—but in the translation let us not lose sight of the importance and the truth of the original. Without keeping close to the original, there is always a danger in a translation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In some recent numbers of the *Guardian* during March, Mr. F. C. Conybeare has made some remarkable observations, which seem to call for qualification, if not by himself, yet at least by those who are interested in the subject. Mr. Conybeare makes at least two assertions: (1) That the verses, Luke i. 34, 35, disappear in several of the most ancient witnesses; (2) that the "Protevangelium Jacobi" fails to bear witness to those verses. With regard to his first statement, which Mr. Conybeare describes as a commonplace of German criticism, he does not mention the fact that both verses are retained by at least two of the most distinguished of German textual critics in their recent editions of the third Gospel. When we turn to the *Evangelium secundum Lucam*, edited by Dr. Blass, we find that although he is well aware of the reading of the Codex Veronensis, in which Mr. Conybeare places such absolute confidence, he retains the two verses in his text precisely as they are retained by Westcott and Hort. And if we turn to Dr. E. Nestle's recent edition of the Greek Testament (1901), we find that he retains the verses precisely as they are retained by the critics previously named. With regard to the second statement Dr. Schmiedel, who would no doubt be ranked amongst the Germans to whom such deference is paid by Mr. Conybeare, informs us that in the "Protevangelium" an angel announces to Mary, during Joseph's absence from home, the birth of Jesus "in the words of