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AN EXPOSITION OF THE JUDAISM OF THE
RABBIS

IS NOT THIS THE SON OF JOSEPH?

*An exposition of the relevant chapters of
the Gospels in the light of Jewish culture*

BY

THOMAS WALKER, D.D. (*Lond.*)

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"Hebrew Religion between the Testaments,"
"Jewish views of Jesus," etc.

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To
EVERY MAN AND WOMAN
INTO WHOSE HOME
A CHILD HAS BEEN WELCOMED
AS A SACRED GIFT FROM GOD

PREFACE

THE birth of Jesus has been for long, and by many, thought to be a marvellous departure from the common manner of entrance into human life. From the early part of the second century the belief has been current that, while he had a mother, there was no father in the strict sense of that term. In view of the astounding excellence of the personality of Jesus, and also as the result of an un-Hebrew-like disparagement of the relationships which are necessary to the process of birth, it came to be assumed that an exceptional manner of entrance into human life was necessary to accomplish so fine a result in human nature.

Now, however, to great numbers of Christian people in places and communions where freedom of thought on sacred subjects is both allowed and respected, as it should be, this vast assumption has no weight at all. In fact, it has come to be regarded as a positive hindrance to a full appreciation of Jesus. If he had at the start such an advantage over others, it was not so wonderful, after all, that he displayed such marvellous consistency

in sacrificial goodness. Besides, what is righteousness so attained to ordinary human beings, who are shut out from the privilege of a supernatural start in life so advantageous? The very assumption makes it quite impossible for them to find any "Gospel" in Jesus. If such goodness could not otherwise come to be in human experience, then in Jesus there is no good news for those whose entrance into human life has been severely ordinary.

The subject of these pages is to be in great measure, though not entirely, the so-called Virgin Birth stories. For a while now one has become accustomed to being told by some Christian theologians that the idea of the birth of Jesus, which is popularly understood to be taught by them, is not essential to the Christian doctrine of the redeeming Personality. But it has not as yet been sufficiently considered that in their original form these stories may have been intended to set forth not virgin, but legitimate birth.

A very careful examination of the stories of the announcement of the coming births of John the Baptist and of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, it is here submitted, should leave the impression that they were not at first intended to convey the idea that there was any essential difference in the manner in which the

earthly pilgrimage of these two great personalities was initiated. In his opening chapters this evangelist, for some not altogether inscrutable reason, seems to have been anxious to establish the fact that Jesus was the legitimate child of Joseph and Mary. As regards Matthew's Gospel, there are some things in the Syriac versions which seem to favour the idea that in the original story Joseph was the father of Jesus. In circles where Hebrew culture prevailed—the very circles from whence these stories are supposed to have come—such stories, it is here contended, would not suggest to anyone an exception to the usual rule of the manner of entrance into human life.

The Markan tradition¹ about Jesus shews no knowledge of any miraculous peculiarity about his birth. The people of Nazareth, who knew him, are represented as saying in great surprise as his exceptional gifts, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" That Joseph is not mentioned here need mean no more than that, ere this, he had died. To his neighbours Jesus was just "brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters herewith us?"² Similarly,

¹ *B. H. Streeter* dates Mark's Gospel A.D. 65.

² Mark vi. 3—Matt. xiii. 55f.

the following announcement is without point, if the terms used are not to be taken in the ordinary meaning, "Look! your mother and your brothers outside are seeking you."¹ This evangelist shews no interest of any sort in any circumstances of his birth. In strange contrast to this, when the other two Synoptic Gospels came to be written,² the evangelist found it necessary, alike for Gentile readers as for Jewish readers, to say something on the birth of Jesus, his place of origin, and his actual family connections in Israel.

¹ Mark iii. 32—Matt. xii. 47—Luke viii. 20.

² *B. H. Streeter* dates Luke's Gospel A.D. 80, and Matthew's Gospel A.D. 85.

Harrow,
1937.

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CHAPTER I

THE SEMITIC MYSTICISM OF THE
CONCEPTION STORIES

“*R. Simlai* said, . . . In the past Adam was created from the dust of the ground and Eve was created from Adam. Henceforward it is to be ‘in our image and after our likeness’—meaning, man will not be able to come into existence without woman, nor woman without man, nor both without the *Shechinah*.”

(*Genesis R. viii*, 9.)

CHAPTER I

THE SEMITIC MYSTICISM OF THE CONCEPTION STORIES

THE document¹ which Luke used at the opening of his Gospel was a genuine product of devout life in Israel. The precision of the content of the visions which are therein given, may be due in part to such knowledge as comes after events. The hymns also may very possibly be later insertions, though there is no very good reason to think that they were. But if they were, then they are all the more remarkable for their genuine Hebrew thought and outlook. The native air of their religion is that of the Temple and the Synagogue.

In them God is "Jehovah, the God of Israel."² He is the great "Preserver," whose servant among His people is to be known

¹ See, for example, *J. Moffatt, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, p. 267, "When the section is viewed as Luke's translation-Greek, and as embodying some primitive document, not as a piece of free composition, i. 5—ii. 52 with iii. 23—28 represent an early Palestinian source which Luke has worked over. . . . He probably translated the source himself from Aramaic . . . here as elsewhere there are fairly evident traces of a Semitic original."

² Luke i. 68.

4 *Is Not This The Son of Joseph?*

as "a prophet of the Highest."¹ The psalmist's interests are revealed as including "Abram our father,"² "David his servant,"³ and guidance "into the way of peace."⁴ These religious songs furnish an interesting example of how, in reference to striking experiences in life, psalms were readily quoted, or else composed, by pious people of the author's religious communion. With some of them, at any rate, to do so had become a habit of their ordinary religious life as good Israelites.

During Paul's detention for "two years"⁵ at Caesarea Luke stood by as close friend and devoted medical attendant of the prisoner. An early Christian preacher of some repute was then resident in that town. "Philip's home" was there, and with its many women-folk this was a very likely place for the mother of Jesus and other women friends and adherents of the New Covenanting movement to meet. In fact, this family of early disciples of Jesus in Israel was accustomed to have visitors to stay with them "from Judaea."⁶ By this time, too, Mary may have once again moved to the south—away from the scenes of her son's activity, where she might have been given too much embarrassing attention

¹ Luke i. 47, 76.

² Luke i. 73.

³ Luke i. 69.

⁴ Luke i. 79.

⁵ Acts xxiv. 27.

⁶ Acts xxi. 8-10.

both from the official class and from the simply curious among the people.

This household of Hebrew Christian prophetesses was not at all an unlikely place for the composition of just such psalms as adorn the early chapters of Luke's Gospel.¹ It is, indeed, a very reasonable supposition that Luke obtained from someone there—possibly during his stay with them, more probably later, but as an outcome of that visit—a written statement on the subject of the birth of Jesus, together with some beautiful poetical embellishments² of the story. There must have been some things being said which made him go to the trouble.³ The statement may have been written at his request, and as a result of confidential talks on the subject,

¹ Cf. *W. M. Ramsay, Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?* p. 79, "Luke gives, from knowledge gained within the family, an account of facts known only to the family, and in part to the mother alone." Also *W. Sanday, Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 644, "Through what channel did it reach the evangelist? Probably through one of the women mentioned in Luke viii. 3, xxiv. 10."

² In respect to "He has visited" (Luke i. 68, cf. 79), it should be noted that in connection with the subject of the conception of children *R. Judah* quoted Job x. 12, "Thy visitation has preserved my spirit." On the word "visitation" *A. Cohen* remarks, "The same Hebrew word as for conception." See *Everyman's Talmud*, p. 83. The allusion to the conception of a child in the use of just such words in the songs would be understood in the circles from whence they came. Cf., "He has looked upon" (Luke i. 48, cf. 25). See also note ¹, page 110 below, on Rabbinical method.

³ See below, note ¹, page 46.

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either with Mary herself or with someone who was very intimately associated with her. Such a document he seems to have translated and used in the introduction of his Gospel, or at any rate enough of it to serve his purpose. Against some as yet indefinite rumours, which, if left where they were, might do harm to the cause he had at heart, he, with exquisite delicacy, suggested in this manner the facts of the case.

The document sought to make it clear to the reader, to begin with, that both John and Jesus came from such devout homes as Judaism by then had very happily made possible by a remarkable development of the prayer-life in Israel. "Zacharias . . . and . . . Elizabeth . . . were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of Jehovah blameless."¹ It was here very plainly represented that these were devout people in Israel, whose life and character were beyond reproach. Here, too, was portrayed a Hebrew girl, who was so living as to be enjoying the constant favour of the one true God. "Rejoice, divinely favoured one!" said the angel to Mary at one of her times of prayer, "Jehovah is with you."²

Elsewhere the same fine loyalty to the

¹ Luke i. 5f.

² Luke i. 28.

ancestral religion was as deliberately specified of Joseph. "Joseph her husband" was "righteous"¹—that is, he was actually in the Hebrew sense a very law-abiding man. His chief joy in life was to fulfil the Torah.² He observed the customary rites, said his prayers at the appointed times and loved his neighbour, as a good Israelite should. They were all rightly held to be saints after the Israelitish fashion of saintliness. Everyone of them was "an Israelite" or Israelitess, "in whom" was "no guile."³

Such godliness as theirs was expected in those days, among their folk, to furnish a very worthy type of home life. This expectation, too, was very far from being merely a pious hope. So frequently, indeed, was it realised in actual life, that the pious Hebrew home was looked upon by then as a unique institution. In the desert of common family life in the Roman Empire it had already come to be regarded as a very real moral oasis. Young people were then never safer—never more protected against the common

¹ Matt. i. 19.

² This Hebrew word means "teaching," or "direction" and is usually translated, though very incorrectly, "Law." It covers the body of teaching, written and oral, ethical and religious, which then constituted Judaism.

³ John i. 47.

perils to pure living—than when they had directly or indirectly the beneficent protection of ordinary Hebrew family life.¹

Hence the references which are here made to the homes of these people are full of significance. In view of the probable circumstances of the writing of this document, these allusions were hardly just accidental. As is the method of the writer elsewhere, they are indirect hints, and because so delicately indirect they are all the more to the point. With the Sabbath morning's worship period in the Temple over, Zacharias's "priest's service" of a week's duration was ended. As soon after as possible "he went away to his home."² It was to that "home of Zacharias"³ that Mary came when she hastened south. Three months later, when she left again for the north, she "returned to her home."⁴ This is the writer's polite manner of telling the reader that Mary had always had the protection of good homes of the pious Hebrew type. The usual escort for such a girl in going from the one home to

¹ *Jebamoth 62b* reads, "Who loves his wife as himself, honours her more than himself, leads his sons and daughters in the right path, and arranges for their marriage soon after puberty." *Chullin 84b* says, "A man should spend less than his means on food and drink for himself, up to his means on his clothes, and above his means on honouring his wife and children."

² Luke i. 23.

³ Luke i. 40.

⁴ Luke. i. 56.

the other is left to be assumed.¹ This is purposeful writing on the part of someone, who is anxious to get the real facts of the case as fully known as possible.

Similarly, the recurring references to "holy spirit"—the active exercise of the power of the Holy One—in sentences other than those which refer to the conception of children, were not made by the writer without a clear intention. For the purpose in mind they were intended to be very definitely significant. By just such allusions Luke's informant sought to make the reader feel again the godly atmosphere of genuine Hebrew prophetic culture, in which both this Joseph and this Mary moved habitually. Such culture was characteristic of their religion. There they could be trusted to keep themselves "unspotted from the world"²—to use a phrase which is credited to one of their sons.

On Mary's arrival at the home of Zacharias, "Elizabeth was filled with holy spirit,"³ and,"

¹ The coming and going of priests between Nazareth and Jerusalem would afford her ample opportunity of a safe escort a good part of the way without much inconvenience to anyone, especially as she had connections with priestly families. See note ¹, page 105 below.

² Jas. i. 27.

³ In *Sotah ix, 15*, *R. Phineas b. Jair* says, indicating the stages to prophetic endowment, "Heedfulness leads to cleanliness, and cleanliness leads to purity, and purity leads to abstinence, and abstinence leads to holiness, and holiness leads to humility,

with the natural enthusiasm and ecstasy of a real prophetess in Israel, "she called out in a great shout."¹ Later, too, her husband "Zacharias . . . was filled with holy spirit and prophesied."² "Holy spirit" also "was on" Simeon, and the oracle on that occasion, it is said, had spoken to him "by the spirit of the Holy."³ In this fashion the writer made the point—obliquely, perhaps, but yet with singular clarity—that this particular couple were known to have moved regularly in just such religious circles as would lead unbiased individuals to feel reasonably certain that their personal relationships would be in perfect consistency with the highest traditions of good people in Israel.

Yet again, in stories of devout Hebrew souls at prayer it was then very customary in plebeian circles, where a spiritual idea of God was appreciated, for angels to be made to represent the vivid thoughts and strong emotions of the person or persons at prayer. In such stories of prayer times, conversations with angels often served to reveal to the

and humility leads to the shunning of sin, and the shunning of sin leads to saintliness, and saintliness leads to the holy spirit." Cf. Rom. v. 3ff., 2 Pet. i. 5ff., for similar stages to a climax in religious experience.

¹ Luke i. 41f.

² Luke i. 67.

³ Luke ii. 25f.

reader the train of thought of devout individuals during their approach to God in prayer. Messages from angels focused for them the result of earnest prayer on urgent problems which at the time were occupying their attention. This vivid representation of the soul's own emotions, thoughts, and final decisions or convictions at prayer, was specially characteristic of Hebrew-minded human conception and birth stories.¹

Consequently it was designed to be clear that the angel's message here, both in the case of Zacharias and in that of Mary, was intended by the writer of the document to make it appear quite beyond doubt that the real basis of everything for each of them was prayer. In each case, too, "the angel" is said to have been "Gabriel."² In the angelology of the time this particular angel was always the bringer of good news³ to the individual at prayer. In these prayer stories he was popularly understood to be the symbol

¹ See below, page 23. In the case of Hannah the old priest takes the place of the heavenly messenger at prayer time.

² Luke i. 19, 26.

³ Michael was thought to be the carrier of the wrathful messages of Jehovah. Gabriel was the bringer of the good tidings of His mercy. Since God was always more merciful than wrathful, the latter was thought to fly with two wings and the former with only one. Michael was the fighter for God; Gabriel was the revealer of the will of God.

of answered prayer. Here, then, the writer wanted to make the reader feel that there was being presented to him two parallel cases of answered prayer. The cases in mind, too, are given with such circumstantial details as would only be of primary interest to one of the persons in the story, or else to one of the very intimate friends of that person.

In the first story the most remarkable day in the life of a rustic priest, who was up at Jerusalem for his half-yearly round of duties, is recalled. Zacharias had "obtained by lot"¹ that very morning the much sought-after duty "to burn incense"² for once in a lifetime in the Holy Place of the Temple during public prayer. In white robes and with unsandalled feet, and accompanied by two attendants, he had entered into the Holy Place. All had been made ready for the duty which he was to fulfil there, and the attendants,³ who had helped him to make the

¹ The first lot designated the various priests who were to cleanse the altar and to prepare the fires; the second, the priest and the twelve nearest to him to offer the sacrifice and cleanse the candlestick and the altar of incense; and the third, the priest to burn the incense. See *A. Edersheim, The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, pp. 158ff.

² Luke i. 9.

³ He on whom the third lot fell chose his two assistants. There was a fourth lot which designated those who were to lay on the altar the sacrifice and the meat-offerings and to pour out the drink-offering. See *ibid.* p. 166.

necessary preparations, had withdrawn again into the open air of the Temple court.

For some time he had waited alone in the shrine, till his colleague, who was sacrificing the lamb at the great Altar of Burnt Offering in the Court, had given him the required signal to proceed with his part of the prescribed ceremony. He had thrown incense on the fire of the golden altar,¹ and the rising smoke was being accompanied by the people's prayers. The ascending incense cloud was to the devout a symbol of the going up of their own prayers into the very presence of the unseen Jehovah.² It was a Sabbath or some feast day, for "a whole crowd of people was praying outside."³ It was a very impressive occasion in the life of a senior priest who had waited so long for this privilege to come his way. It was a most memorable—and may well have been the most thrilling—moment in his long experience as a priest of the Most High.

¹ Cf. Exod. xxx. 1-10, "And you shall make an altar to burn incense upon: of acacia wood shall you make it. . . . And you shall overlay it with pure gold, . . . And . . . shall burn thereon incense. . . . every morning, . . . And . . . at even . . . a perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. You shall offer no strange incense thereon, . . . it is most holy to the Lord."

² Cf. Ps. cxli. 2, "My prayer is prepared as incense before Thee."

³ Luke i. 10.

In connection with this particular ceremony at the Temple, there had been for a long time a popular superstitious dread of some irregularity in the shrine, such as might, for one thing, bring a personal disaster to the officiating priest himself. It was accordingly understood that the priest on duty within should return from the interior of the shrine into the open court as soon as his prescribed task was done and he had offered his parting prayer. Hence there was some anxiety displayed on this particular occasion. "The people were on the look out for Zacharias, and were wondering at his delay in the shrine."¹ They were filled with dread, lest the old and deaf priest had bungled the rite and met with a tragic end.

During the performance of a solemn rite in the shrine, important divine intimations had been known to have been made to the officiating priest.² So it had actually happened to Zacharias on this, for him, very

¹ Luke i. 21.

² For example, *Josephus* narrates, "Now a very surprising thing is related of this high-priest Hyrcanus, how God came to discourse with him; for they say that on the very same day on which his sons fought with Antiochus Cyzicenus, he was alone in the Temple, as high-priest, offering incense, and heard a voice, that his sons had just then overcome Antiochus. And this he openly declared before all the multitude on his coming out of the Temple; and it accordingly proved true." *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XIII, Chapter., X, 3.

unique time of prayer. At other prayer times he had been praying for the completion of his home-life by the birth of "a son."¹ A child was expected before long at his home. He had prayed about the matter previous to this appearance on duty within the shrine. Now at this prayer time in the Holy Place, as private prayer mingled with the public ritual—a very common experience among the devout—he at long last came to feel assured that all would go well with his good wife, and that, too, especially to the very much desired end, namely, the birth of a *male* child² into their home.

On this occasion the private prayer of the priest and the public prayer for God's Kingdom were not after all very far apart in spirit. Like his relative Joseph³ he hoped that the boy would grow up to contribute to the furtherance of the cause which he had so much at heart—"to get people into a state of preparation for Jehovah."⁴ He wanted him to be above all things "great" in the truest

¹ Luke i. 13.

² Rabbinic literature reveals that it was customary to come to the Temple to pray for sons. Note, for example, the following, "When an Israelite comes to the Temple and prays for sons or for anything else, if it is fitting, give it to him." See C. G. Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*, p. 149.

³ See below, page 65.

⁴ Luke i. 17.

sense, namely, in service "in the eyes of Jehovah."¹

In the prayer time vision of this devout priest of Israel "Jehovah's angel" had appeared, where he had hoped he would appear. Where the good man had been looking for the angel of the Lord, there he stood "on the right," that is, on the propitious "side of the altar of incense."² "Don't fear, Zacharias," said this heavenly herald of God's favour, "for your request was heard." His special prayer on the subject in mind, which he had prayed on earlier occasions, had been answered.

That oft-repeated prayer had been a prayer for "a son,"^{3 4} such as would grow up to influence "the stubbornly disloyal" to God, to reveal in improved family life, in which "fathers' hearts" would "turn toward children," the "understanding of righteous"⁵ persons such as they themselves were. This very

¹ Luke i. 15.

² Luke i. 11.

³ Luke i. 13.

⁴ In *Baba Bathra 16b* one reads of the preference for sons over daughters, "A Rabbi's wife gave birth to a daughter and he was very upset about it. His father to cheer him said, 'Increase has come into the world.' But another Rabbi told him, 'Your father has given you empty comfort; for there is a Rabbinical dictum, The world cannot exist without males and females, but happy is he whose children are sons and woe to him whose children are daughters.'"

⁵ Luke i. 17.

incidental reference on the part of the writer to the restoration of good family life in Israel was again very much to the point. The evangelist's informant takes care never to let the reader run any risk of forgetting the enthusiasm of these people for an excellent type of home life.

Since he and his wife, the story goes on, "were both advanced in their days,"¹ Zacharias made up his mind "in the shrine"² to "keep silence."³ He determined to keep his own counsel about the encouraging prayer-time "vision."⁴ He himself was "an elderly man,"⁵ and his wife was not at all young. He was troubled with deafness, and had probably missed the signal at which he was to commence burning the incense. Consequently he had held up the ceremony in the Temple Court,⁶ and when he emerged to view again, prior to the pronouncement of the benediction by the other priest, he could not help revealing very considerable confusion.

¹ Luke i. 7.

² Luke i. 9.

³ Luke i. 20.

⁴ Luke i. 22.

⁵ Luke i. 18.

⁶ ". . . the chief officiating priest was left alone within the Holy Place, to await the signal of the president before burning the incense . . . the president gave the word of command, which marked that 'the time of incense had come.'" *A. Edersheim, The Temple*, p. 167.

Yet he offered no explanation of this delay of his in the shrine. "He on his part went on nodding to them, and was remaining stupefied." When after his unusual and really frightful delay, even as far as the people outside were concerned, he came out again safe and sound, to that anxiously waiting crowd he looked dazed and dumb.¹ They very naturally and rightly came to the conclusion that he had been greatly upset, or even terribly frightened, by "a vision" which "he had seen in the shrine."² They took this charitable view of his extraordinary conduct on the occasion. They quite understood that he might "not be able to speak"³ of it just then, and asked for no further explanation.

Later it is recalled that at the naming of the baby his friends "were making inquiry by nods to" him, as "the father" of the child, as to "what he should like" the little boy "to be called."⁴ In reply to them, "having asked for a little waxed tablet," with an iron pen, "he wrote, saying, 'John is a name of him.'"⁵ This was possibly half an indication

¹ Cf. Dan. x. 15, "And when he had spoken to me according to these words, I turned my face toward the ground and was dumb."

² Luke i. 22.

³ Luke i. 20, cf. 22.

⁴ Luke i. 62.

⁵ Luke i. 63.

of his own mind on the subject and half a query which was intended for submission to the oracle for final decision. In that case he and the others waited for the oracular "yes" or "no."¹ When the oracle confirmed his own and his wife's preference for the name "John,"² he made no secret of his joy, "blessing God" for the Divine favour, of which this name was to be a constant reminder. The couple were deeply impressed with "the favour of Jehovah"³ in the gift to them of a boy-child.

Not until that very moment "was his mouth opened"⁴ on the subject of the extraordinary vision in the shrine. Very wisely, under the circumstances, the old priest had held "his tongue"⁵ about his experience at that particular prayer time in the Temple. He kept his own counsel about it, till he saw the little boy safe in his home. His story of the vision, which probably he now told

¹ Probably in the casting of the lots small tablets, for one thing, were used, on one of which was inscribed the name to which an affirmative or a negative was to be obtained. Cf. *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. III, p. 153, also *G. Milligan, Selections from the Greek Papyri*, pp. 68f.

² Luke i. 13, 60.

³ The probable reference in the choice of the name, John.

⁴ Cf. Dan. x. 16, "And then one in the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips; then I opened my mouth, and spake, and said to him who stood before me. . . ."

⁵ Luke i. 64.

to his friends for the first time, "invoked a spirit of reverence in their neighbours." Ever after as the result of that story "they used to gossip"¹ about a possible great future for the little boy.

Intertwined with this story there is here given another, of like import, concerning one called Mary. At the time she was "a girl-wife,"² who had not yet had her first child. She "had been betrothed to a husband named Joseph." She was then a young woman, who had had, and had got beyond, betrothed status in Israel, and so, in accordance with the civil law of her people, she was a married woman.³ Her husband, as did also some other people of his day, claimed to be "of David's house."⁴ Hillel was the son of very poor parents, and on his mother's side held that he was a descendant of king David. Josephus, too, put in a word or two for him-

¹ Luke i. 65.

² The evangelist's translation is redolent of the consulting room of a medical man. The Greek word here used, *parthenos*, and in English usually translated "virgin," for him probably indicated a period of life, in contrast with another period in a woman's life, which he indicates in verse 36 by the word, *gêras*, which is rendered in our English version "old age," and of which it has been said that it "was used by the ancient physicians to mark one particular period of human life." See *W. K. Hobart, The Medical Language of St. Luke*, p. 94. Cf. also note ³ on page 72 below.

³ See note ² page 38 below; also note ⁴ page 67 below.

⁴ Luke i. 27.

self on the same lines.¹ So also did this obscure Joseph.²

Shortly after this Mary had received news of her "relative, Elizabeth," and especially of her progress as far as the "sixth month" toward child-birth, she was praying at "Nazareth."³ At prayer she, too, had a gracious prayer-time vision.⁴ "Don't fear, Mary," said the very angel who had brought good news to Zacharias, "for you have found favour from God."⁵ She had been praying for "a son"⁶ who would become a credit to his reputed ancestry. Her heart's desire was that he would grow up to be a man of God—"a son of the Most High."⁷ ⁸ She felt sure that

¹ "By my mother I am of the royal blood." *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, 1.

² A. H. McNeile remarks on the reference to "his brothers" in the genealogy, Matt. i. 11, that it "seems to mark the fact that after the Exile there existed more than one Davidic family, any one of which might have inherited the monarchy." *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 2. See below, page 54, note ²; page 55, note ³.

³ Luke i. 26, cf. 36.

⁴ Compare the following, "I do not know how many times I have heard it stated in my native land and at our own fire-side that heavenly messengers in the form of patron saints or angels came to pious, childless wives, in dreams and visions, and cheered them with the promise of maternity. It was nothing uncommon for such women to spend a whole night in a shrine 'wrestling in prayer,' . . . for such a divine assurance; and I remember a few of my own kindred to have done so." A. M. Rihbany, *The Syrian Christ*, p. 10.

⁵ Luke i. 30.

⁶ Luke i. 31.

⁷ Luke i. 32.

⁸ See note ² on page 25 below.

the good providence of God would be recognisable in her case, that of a young wife—as in the case of her relative, that of an older woman in Israel, who had had a mother's hope long deferred.

Her knowledge of the relevant literature of her people had given her confidence in Jehovah in respect to the issue which was most of all in her mind at the time. She verily believed, as the literature which appeared in the lists of rolls, then held sacred for use in worship, had taught her, that “not a single thing from God”—that is, on God's part, as far as the only God was concerned—“shall be ineffective.”¹ Besides that, these words, she knew, had been shewn to be true very particularly in the case of the much older Elizabeth.² In the course of her visionary meditation at prayer, she accepted the situation with regard to herself, as it was then revealed to her, with the glad heart of a devout Hebrew woman of her day. “See!” said she, “a bondmaid of Jehovah! Let it happen to me according to Thy word!”³ She wished that it might be to a Hebrew girl like herself, as

¹ Luke i. 37.

² “If, originally, the angel merely told Mary that she would bear a son in the ordinary way, . . . then the mention of the Elizabeth miracle becomes suitable enough.” *C. G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels*, Vol. II, p. 369.

³ Luke i. 38.

God's good will might dictate that it should be.

She was not ignorant of the fact that the sacred rolls could furnish her with remarkable illustrations of this very sort of experience at prayer. This, she knew, had been the experience of Abram and Hannah, also of Manoaah and his wife.¹ The creed of her people, too, in reference to God and children, could be put in language such as could be taken almost at random from the columns of those sacred writings. For example, "Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory";² "The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life";³ "For it is Thou Who didst form my reins, Thou screenedst me in the womb of my mother."⁴ There are many other passages to the same effect, and equally explicit.

These people had come to regard themselves as the sacred offspring of the mighty spirit of the Holy. In the conception of children of their religious community there was recognised one of the chief manifestations of His glory in their midst. In their ritual of thanksgiving this was given a place of very

¹ Cf. Gen. xvii. 15-xviii. 15, 1 Sam. i. 9-18, Jud. xiii. 2-24.

² Isa. vi. 3.

³ Job xxxiii. 4.

⁴ Ps. cxxxix. 13.

significant prominence. This sublime idea of the creative providence of Jehovah in the life of the family was in their day native to the pious mind of the Synagogue.¹ Among them it was reverently taken for granted that neither male nor female could or should be conceived without the presence of the *Shechinah* with the man and the woman. The Holy One was piously thought by them to be an essential co-partner with the devout father and the devout mother in the production of the child.

Accordingly it is here insisted that both the conception of John and the conception of Jesus were not brought about without the agency of "holy spirit."² The assurance of "holy spirit" at the conception of the child, it is held, was given to Zacharias concerning Elizabeth. "Of holy spirit shall he be filled from out the womb of his mother."³

¹ The reader should here read the quotations on page 2 above, and pages 36 and 58 below, the relevance of which to material in Luke i and Matt. i, can only be fully appreciated when the practical equivalence—in this association—of *Shechinah* and *Holy Spirit* is borne in mind. See further the note below.

² "And then, again, there is the fact that in passages which recur in Talmud and Midrash, whereas one of the versions may contain the phrase 'Holy Spirit,' another may report exactly the same thing of the 'Shechinah.' . . . It may be for this reason that the N.T. often uses *pneuma hagion* for the *Shechinah* of the original Hebrew or Aramaic." *J. Abelson, The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature*, pp. 207f.

³ Luke i. 15.

Similarly the message to Mary about herself was, "Holy spirit will come upon you, and power from the Highest"—the *Shechinah*—"will envelope you, and so the offspring shall be called holy," shall come to have recognition as "a son of God,"¹ which in their circle meant one so set apart for God, so consecrated, as would joyously take on himself the yoke of the Law, and sanctify the Name of God.²

Here the circumstances of the conception of these children within their religious communion are intended to be taken as identical. In the one case, they are looked upon from a husband's point of view. In the other case, they are passed in review by the wife herself. In both cases—and equally, too—Semitic mysticism, it is to be understood, is colouring for these devout people in Israel the experience of the conception of children. These stories of the announcement of the coming births do not, then, reveal any essential differences, either in content or in intention. Evidently it was the writer's purpose to draw a parallel, and not to present a contrast.

Both of the women concerned, too, the

¹ Luke i. 35.

² *R. Judah*, commenting on the text, "You are the children of the Lord your God," said, "At the time that you conduct yourselves as dutiful children, you are called God's children; but when you do not so conduct yourselves, you are not called God's children" (*Kiddushin* 36a).

writer wishes the reader to understand, on their part assumed this notion of the conception of children. In the story their reference to their own experience of conception is made in identical terms. *Elizabeth*, it is narrated, was accustomed to say in respect to her condition, "*Thus to me*" or "*Thus for me has done Jehovah*, in the days in which He looked in my direction to take away my reproach among folk,"¹—that is, among her own Hebrew folk,² to whom "children are a gift from Jehovah," to whom "the fruit of the womb is a reward"³ from the only wise God. *Mary*, it is represented, gave expression to the same idea of child-conception in language which, in the crucial phrase, was identical with that of Elizabeth. She said, "*He did to me*" or "*He did for me* great things, the Mighty" as He is, "and holy is his name."⁴

It is of the utmost importance to note that,

¹ Luke i. 25.

² "By a play of words the thought is expressed that children (*banim*) are builders (*bonim*): they not only build the future of the family but likewise of the community (*Berachoth* 64a). 'A childless person is accounted as dead' (Gen. R. lxxi. 6), since he has failed to carry out the principal duty which devolved upon him, and his name will perish with him. Intentional childlessness was denounced as a serious sin." Hence, "A daughter is a vain treasure to her father . . . when she is married lest she be childless" (*Sanhedrin* 100b). See *A Cohen, Everyman's Talmud*, pp. 179ff.

³ Ps. cxxvii. 3, cf. Luke i. 42.

⁴ Luke i. 49.

in respect to the two cases under consideration, the idea of the conception of a child is here allowed by the writer of this document to be expressed in precisely the same terms, and that, too, by the women themselves. It seems that of set purpose the two women are made to say practically the same thing about themselves. Nothing, then, could make it much clearer than this does that the writer intended that there should not be the slightest possibility of distinguishing in any respect the nature of the experience of these two women of Israelitish upbringing.

Further, Elizabeth and Mary are made to meet as women who thought that their experiences had been in every respect the same. On hearing news of Elizabeth, Mary hastened south into the Judaeon highlands for an extended stay with her. She wanted to be of some service to her. She did not leave again for the north until she had seen her relative through the weeks following her child's birth. On meeting, the older woman offered her congratulations to the younger woman. She said, "Blessed you among women!"—as one would say, "Fortunate girl to be so young!"—"And blessed the fruit of your womb!"¹ Then she proceeded

¹ Luke i. 42.

to remark on her own condition. "And whence to me is this"—she continued, pointing to herself—"that there should come the womb from Jehovah, to *me*"¹ of all persons.

Once again there is here revealed the real Hebrew notion of the function of Jehovah in the conception of children of devout people, which is never out of the author's mind, and which he will not let the reader forget. By God's good providence the apparently lifeless condition of the elder woman's womb was very happily a thing of the past. Of the two she was, if anything, the more aware of a special providence in the matter. On Mary's arrival she had felt "the babe"² move within her. She thereupon expressed her confidence for the future. "And happy she who trusted that there shall be a fulfilment" of the much desired end "on Jehovah's part."³ She expressed her joy in believing that, as far as Jehovah was concerned, all would go well.

¹ Luke i. 43, reading *mētrē* or *mētra* "womb," for *mētēr*, "mother." Cf. Luke ii. 23, Rom. iv. 19.

The present text may have originated with nothing more than a scribe's slip of the pen, writing *ēr* for *rē*, or else *ar* for *ra*, the *ar* then under ecclesiastical influence being later altered to *ēr*. There are many such "slips of the pen and misspellings of scribes" in the manuscripts of the New Testament. See *K. Lake, The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 3ff.

² Luke i. 44, cf. 41.

³ Luke i. 45.

Among these people the conception of a child by sacred spirit was thought to be the very antithesis of the conception of it by profane spirit. By strict Israelites the fact of conception by holy spirit was not recognised at all, unless both the parents were fully acknowledged members of the essentially sacred community, such as Israel was then held to be. For long there had circulated among them the legend of the relation of evil spirits with women and of the monstrous brood which resulted from that type of union. The legend was a satire on the conception of children by profane spirit.¹ ² They were conceived by folk who knew no such sanctuary as Judaism had made familiar to its adherents. In contrast with the tragedy of the spirit, in which some children were brought into the world, was the manner of their coming to the pious Israelitish home, in which "the fruit of the womb"³ was revered as a reward from Jehovah.

¹ Cf. Gen. vi. 1-4.

² The Watchers, as they were called, "took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and began to go in unto them and to defile themselves with them, and they taught them charms and enchantments, . . . And they became pregnant, and they bare great giants, . . . who consumed the acquisitions of men. . . . Then the earth laid accusation against the lawless ones." (1 Enoch vii). See further on such legends the present writer's *Hebrew Religion Between the Testaments*, pp. 83-87.

³ Luke i. 42, cf. Ps. cxxvii. 3.

This distinction was as clear to these people as was the distinction between the unholy thing and the holy. In actual life it was as much respected by the devout among them. It was also actually in terms of this old Hebrew idea of the conception of children that the great ex-Pharisee Paul expressed himself on the subject of the recognition of children within the early Church circles. In his usual daringly liberal manner he laid it down that *one* believing parent was quite sufficient to establish the fact that the children were born of holy spirit. He told his Corinthian friends that they need have no worry over the matter, for, he argued, "the unbelieving husband has been made holy by the" believing "wife, and the unbelieving wife has been made holy by the" believing "brother, otherwise your children—impure are they, but now," on the contrary, "holy are they."¹

The children of the devout were held to be the manifestation of the spirit of the Holy in the happy and pure home-life, such as was by then an occasion for very just pride in pious Hebrew circles.² With this in mind

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 14.

² "The ordinary term for a marriage is *Kiddushin*, denoting 'sanctification.' It is so-called because 'the husband prohibits his wife to the whole world like the object which is dedicated to the sanctuary' (*Kiddushin* 2b). It implies the strictest

Luke's contributor has gone to great trouble to represent that the conception of John and the conception of Jesus were in exact parallelism in every circumstance. He states the facts with regard to each of them in identical terms. The reason, too, for giving here such a painstaking parallel is not far to seek.

For a long time the disciples of John were very numerous. They had not all become disciples of Jesus. For a while in some quarters there was serious competition between the two sets of disciples, so much so that every evangelist realised that he had to make very clear what exactly was the relation to one another of John and Jesus as practically contemporary prophets in Israel. A generation or so after John's death his disciples were still to be found far away from Palestine.

Some of them were then at Ephesus.¹ The opinion has gained ground that for a while Luke's Gospel was in private circulation. After a measure of private use, it was sufficiently in favour to be adopted as the Gospel to be used by a Church. This Church, it is thought, was the Church in the city of Ephesus,² where

chastity in both parties. 'Immorality in the house is like a worm on vegetables' (*Sotah 3b*), and it holds good of the husband as well as the wife." *A. Cohen, Everyman's Talmud*, p. 174.

¹ Acts xix. 1-7.

² "The interest shown by John"—that is, the Gospel of

his friend Paul had had at one time very great influence. In the services of that Church it first made its public appearance, and under the auspices of that Church it first got into circulation and public use elsewhere.

Clearly, then, in some quarters John was being put forward seriously as a rival, and very much more acceptable prophet of Israel than Jesus. However else, then, people might decide on the relative merits of these two eminent prophets, the author of these few well written pages goes to great trouble to make it quite clear that they were both equally the children of very devout Hebrew parents. Both of them were born of holy spirit. Elizabeth of "the province of Judaea"¹ and Mary of the province of Galilee, very different in age though they were, were both of them true mothers in Israel. They were real happy companions in their exemplification of the Israelitish ideal of motherhood.

John—"in identifying and connecting persons and places, or in elaborating incidents, mentioned in Luke is more likely, if they occurred in some document regarded by his readers as a standard account of the life of Christ rather than in a mere floating tradition . . . the Gospel of Luke was . . . already on the way to becoming a standard work in the Church of Ephesus, when the Fourth Gospel was written." *B. H. Streeter, The Four Gospels*, pp. 407, 540. He dates the Fourth Gospel, A.D. 90-95, without the Appendix, A.D. 90.

¹ Luke i. 39. See *C. C. Torrey, The Four Gospels*, p. 114.

The original beauty of the early document, which was here utilised by the evangelist, has been spoiled by someone, whose mind was as far removed as possible from the mind of the composer of the document. The copies of the Gospel which were in use in the great churches of the Emperor Constantine contained the words, "Mary said to the angel, How shall this be, since no man am I knowing?"¹

An old Latin manuscript² of good repute among scholars has here escaped the attention of the ecclesiastical scribes. In its out-of-the-way home in northern Italy or in the province of Africa it continued to shew no knowledge of these crude words. Obviously they were a later insertion in the interest of a Church dogma, which by then had unfortunately taken possession of the field. Their shocking crudity could only have been tolerated under ecclesiastical pressure. More than one³ Church Father of the period reveals

¹ Luke i. 34.

² "It is notable that the Old Latin MS. *b* omits this verse, substituting for it . . . the first half of verse 38; . . . And as the reading of *b* makes excellent sense, the possibility must be considered that it represents the text as Luke wrote it, the ordinary text being a piece of harmonistic editing intended to make it clear that Luke as well as Matthew attached importance to the Virginity." *B. H. Streeter, ibid.*, pp. 267f.

³ e.g., Jerome and Chrysostom.

34 *Is Not This The Son of Joseph?*

how embarrassing were such crudities in the ecclesiastical text of the Gospels.¹

These words, then, serve to illustrate how a Greek mind, with its pre-suppositions concerning human nature so very different from those of the Hebrew mind, very readily misunderstood a Semitic conception story of really exquisite beauty. The Virgin Birth idea was an error of the Greek-minded leaders of the early Church in the second century, who, in spite of their professions to have done so, never really got entirely free from the erroneous notion of their upbringing, that the human body was the seat of evil for the soul. They lamentably misinterpreted a Semitic story of the conception of a child of Hebrew parents.

Among people of Hebrew training the story of the conception of Jesus would not suggest an exception to the usual rule of entrance into human life any more than would the companion story of the conception of John. With such obviously Hebrew pre-suppositions as are revealed in the story, the writer could never have intended it to have done so.

¹ *Jerome* held that Joseph made the discovery about Mary's condition, for he had at the time almost a husband's freedom with her; *Chrysostom*, that a betrothed couple in that day were allowed to live together under necessary restriction.

CHAPTER II

THE EVANGELIST'S VERSION OF THE
MANGER STORY

“When husband and wife are worthy, the
Shechinah is with them.”

(*Sotah* 17a.)

CHAPTER II

THE EVANGELIST'S VERSION OF THE MANGER STORY

THERE is papyri evidence,¹ that an order to appear at a particular place for a census was sometimes associated with the person's duties in respect of the cultivation of land in the neighbourhood of the place. Whatever Luke may have done about the census here in mind, he has succeeded wonderfully well in his main object. He has so handled his material as to make it quite clear, that this Jesus was the child of a devout couple named Joseph and Mary.

In accordance with a method of enrolment, which was a concession to Jewish prejudices, Joseph went up from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Mary, who was expecting very soon to give birth to a child, travelled

¹ For example, the following, "Seeing that the time has come for the house to house census, it is necessary to compel all those who for any cause whatsoever are residing out of their homes to return to their own homes, that they may both carry out the regular order of the census, and may attend diligently to the cultivation of their allotments." *G. Milligan, Selections from the Greek Papyri*, p. 73 ; see also pp. 44-47 for an actual census return dated A.D. 48. The Roman method was to enrol a person at his place of residence.

with him as "his wife."¹ So read the Sinaitic Syriac version and some old Latin texts. The former also says that Mary accompanied him "because they were both of the house of David." It seems, too, that they were taking this opportunity to settle in Bethlehem on land belonging to their family.

The reference to betrothal in the Greek text here may be the result of the influence of the text of Matthew with which it has been made to agree. But be that as it may, by the retention of the word "wife" after this reference to betrothal, the Vulgate and other authorities have made it clear what they found in their sources concerning the relationship of this man and this woman to each other. Mary "had been betrothed to him," that is, theirs had not been a chance meeting. She had gone through the usual betrothal procedure with him, as a Jewish woman was supposed to do, and thereupon had proceeded to her rightful position in his home as the legal wife of Joseph.² At this

¹ Luke ii. 5.

² The Mishnaic tract *Kiddushin* deals with the subject of betrothals. In it one reads, "By three means is the woman acquired. . . . She is acquired by money or by writ or by intercourse. . . . A deceased brother's wife is acquired by intercourse" (i. i). Betrothal by writ meant that in the presence of witnesses there was delivered to the woman by the man a document saying, "Be thou betrothed to me." From that moment she was legally his wife. There only

journey's end "she gave birth to the son,"—to the *male* child, which both of them had hoped "her first-born"¹ baby might be.

The couple knew that on arrival at their destination a house would not be ready for them. When they got there they discovered that a hired lodging was not now to be had upstairs at the caravanserai.² This inn at Bethlehem was an ancient one.³ It was a well known stopping place on the caravan route which in those days went from Jerusalem to Egypt. On this occasion the paved recesses, which surrounded its courtyard, were all occupied with travellers like themselves.

Consequently this Joseph and Mary had to make the best arrangements for themselves they could. What they did is not very clear, though the reference to a "manger" being available close by them implies at least

remained the taking of the bride home, a ceremony which might take place any time afterward, as circumstances might determine, though not just immediately after. See further note ⁴ page 67 below.

¹ Luke ii. 7.

² *kataluma*, translated "inn" in English versions, here is ambiguous. Cf. Luke xxii. 11,—Mark xiv. 14, where it is translated "guest chamber." See further note⁴ page 99 below.

³ Jer. xli. 17 reads, "And they departed and dwelt in Geruth Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt." A. W. Streane says, "The Hebrew for habitation (*geruth*) occurs here only. The sense, however, is pretty clear, viz., Khan or Caravanserai. . . . The special utility of this Khan lay in its being on the great caravan route to Egypt." *Jeremiah*, p. 269.

peasant accommodation¹ at the caravanserai. The young woman, too, at the birth of her child had to do the best she could for herself, since they had failed to secure one of the upper rooms at the inn. But in spite of all the difficulties of the peculiar circumstances in which she so inconveniently found herself, she managed to do the necessary and customary thing. She wrapped her newly born baby round and round with swathes. "She wrapped him in swaddling clothes." She did, too, as many a peasant woman had done in much happier circumstances than hers then were,—she "laid" the baby to sleep "in a manger."²

It is here also recalled³ that at the time patriotic opinion in the neighbourhood had created some local interest in the news that very soon there was to be a girl-mother in connection with a very old family in the district—the only one, indeed, in those parts which had ever been found laying any claim

¹ "It is common to find two sides of the one room where the native farmer resides with his cattle fitted up with these mangers, and the remainder elevated about two feet higher for the accommodation of the family. The mangers are built of small stones and mortar, in the shape of a box, or rather of a kneading-trough; and, when cleaned up and white-washed, as they often are in summer, they do very well to lay little babes in. Indeed our own children have slept in them." *W. M. Thompson, The Land and The Book*, p. 413.

² Luke ii. 7.

³ Cf. Luke ii. 4. 11.

to having any degree of royal blood in its veins. This news was quite enough to set some mystically-minded priestly shepherds¹ of the Temple flocks in the fields near by a-dreaming at one of their appointed times of prayer, when, with fires burning to scare off wild beasts, "they were standing guard over their flock in relays during the night."² At this particular prayer time of theirs they became entranced with a sense of "Jehovah's glory"³ encircling them.

These were people who belonged to the son "of David" type of Messianists—a type which, after many vicissitudes during two centuries past, had once again become popular in Palestine.⁴ They were Messiah-minded folk who were looking for "Jehovah's

¹ The flocks kept in this neighbourhood were for the Temple services. See *Shekalim* vii. 4, "If cattle are found between Jerusalem and as far as Migdal Eder, or within the like distance in any direction, males must be deemed to be Whole-offerings and females Peace-offerings." Eder is mentioned in Gen. xxxv. 21. It was near Bethlehem.

² Luke ii. 8.

³ Luke ii. 9.

⁴ "With the Psalms of Solomon the idea of the Messiah as the son of David makes its appearance again to become by the beginning of our era once more the popular conception: 'Thou, O Lord, didst choose David (to be) king over Israel, and swardst to him touching his seed that never should his kingdom fail before Thee. . . . Behold, O Lord, and raise up unto them their king, the son of David,' (xvii. 5, 23). T. Walker, *The Teaching of Jesus and The Jewish Teaching of His Age*, p. 133.

Anointed" to appear. They may even have been local propagandists for the Davidic type of Messianic expectation, who were out to work up some local enthusiasm for the idea. Their hearts were set on "a saviour" or "a deliverer"¹ of their nation from Rome's domination. They had been meditating on a sort of good news such as would, if ever it came true, gladden the hearts of "all the people"² to whom they belonged.

The good news they most desired was that of a living "sign"³ or emblem of the much hoped for, but very long deferred, "peace among men of favour" in the sight of Jehovah—and that, too, "in a land"⁴ so dear to their hearts, as their own land was. They were inspired with visions of a Holy Land, in which the saints of the Lord would be freed from their present misfortunes, and be able to dwell in perfect peace around the Temple. This peace for their folk in a sacred country in which the influence of the idolater would be no longer felt, was for their souls to be just the clear reflection on earth of the glory of Jehovah in the heavens. In their mystic rapture at this particular prayer time they had an experience of "the angel"⁵ voice

¹ Luke ii. 11.

² Luke ii. 10.

³ Luke ii. 12.

⁴ Luke ii. 14.

⁵ Luke ii. 10.

such as calmed their fears and gave them some confidence in respect to the early fulfilment of their hopes.¹ Such was the impression made on them at this particular meeting for prayer that it seemed to them that the very angels were singing along with them, as they themselves with faces upturned towards heaven chanted some hymn of praise ascribing, "Glory to God on high."²

They were immediately aflame with enthusiasm, as very devout people of the East can sometimes be after prayer. This prayer time over, no time was lost by them. Some of them went on a search round the district. After a while they came at last to the ancient caravanserai—the only place which now remained for them to search. There they "found" what they had been looking for, "an infant wrapped in swaddling clothes."³ It was probably the only child born anywhere in the neighbourhood that night. That was

¹ The following are very representative expressions of such hopes, "And it shall come to pass, when he has brought low everything that is in the world, and has sat down in peace for the age on the throne of his Kingdom, that joy shall then be revealed, and rest shall appear" (2 *Baruch* lxxiii. 1). "Good law shall come in all its fulness from the starry heaven upon men, and good justice, and with it the best of all gifts to men, sober concord, and affection, faithfulness, friendship from strangers and fellow citizens too" (*Sibylline Oracle*, iii. 373-376).

² Luke ii. 13f.

³ Luke ii. 12, 16.

quite enough for them. Their minds had been made up as a result of their experiences at prayer that night that the first child they found to have been born that night must be he. They had found no child anywhere around, till they came to the old inn in the town. That was a good enough confirmation of their faith in their prayer-time inspiration. Here was a newly born swaddled baby—the legitimate child of a Bethlehemite father.

This is the second occasion¹ on which the narrator has called the reader's attention to the fact that the baby had been wrapped round and round with swathes. It should be here remembered, especially in view of other evidence of the influence of Ezekiel² in this Gospel, how an unswaddled child was used with great effect in one of the most telling of the prophecies of that great preacher of Judaism. That prophet is represented as picturing for his hearers the Holy City as a child who had not been swaddled at all. "And as for your nativity," he said, "in the day when you were born your cord was not cut, you were not washed in water

¹ Cf. Luke. ii. 7.

² For example, Luke ix. 51, "He set his face steadfastly toward" or "against Jerusalem." The phrase, "to set the face steadfastly against" is frequent in Ezekiel. It signifies the prophetic attitude toward a place or a people. In Ezekiel xxi. 2, it is actually used in reference to Jerusalem.

to cleanse you; you were *not* salted¹ or *swaddled*. No eye pitied you, to do any of these things out of compassion for you; but you were cast forth into the open field, in contempt for your person, on that day when you were born."² Such was the prophet's allegory of a foundling child. It was an allegory of how Jehovah long long ago had found them. It was an allegory of Jerusalem's base origin.

These shepherd, Messianically-minded priests of the Temple flocks near Bethlehem found this baby, it is true, "lying in the manger."³ To individuals who might be unacquainted with, or for the moment forgetful of, the peasant use of mangers as cradles, this might at once suggest that this child was unwanted. In some quarters it probably did suggest this. In all likelihood what had to be faced by the evangelist,⁴ before he proceeded with his account of the public activity of this Jesus, was the beginning of a slanderous story which, at a later date, attained very

¹ "In certain localities in Syria, to say to a person that he was not 'salted' upon birth is to invite trouble. Only . . . the child of an unrecognised father is so neglected." *A. M. Rihbany, The Syrian Christ*, pp. 21f.

² Ezek. xvi. 4f.

³ Luke ii. 16.

⁴ *B. H. Streeter* suggests A.D. 80 as the date of the writing of the Gospel.

ugly dimensions in some unfriendly Jewish circles.¹ He bravely faced up to the very beginnings of a rumour that his hero was a foundling child of uncertain origin.

Hence he stressed the fact that these shepherd searchers came across there in the inn "both the Mary and the Joseph" to whom the child belonged, and presumably by one of them, probably the father, they were led in to see "the baby lying in the manger."² In a word, the parents of the child were there in the inn, when these priests called very early next morning. The child, too, had received all the attention usual in the case of a devoutly wanted child in Israel. When they first caught sight of it, it was lying

¹ For these see *J. Klausner, Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 18-54. For a convenient summary of them, see the present writer's *Jewish Views of Jesus*, Chapter I. To the present writer the data seem to warrant the idea that the sequence of events as regards these rumours and stories was:—A circulation of a rumour about the manger birth incident; Luke's true version of the incident and Matthew's simple story of his birth to Joseph and Mary; the emergence of the Virgin Birth dogma; the protest of some within the Church and controversy with Jews; ecclesiastical favour for the dogma; the mocking and not unnatural retort of the Jews that the truth was out; the more or less complete adjustment of Church documents to the dogma and the beginning of enthusiasm for a Canon of such literature; the beginning of a literary form of the Jewish retort. Meanwhile Greek-speaking Jews had got their own version of the Old Testament and had ceased to a great extent to use the Septuagint. See a reference to *Aquila* on page 72 below.

² Luke ii. 16.

comfortably in the manger in a swaddled condition.¹

The evangelist had to admit what some opponents, it seems, had gone to the trouble to make public, that this baby Jesus had been found by some visitors shortly after birth lying in a manger at the local khan. But having in all frankness admitted so much, he yet urged on the attention of the reader that on the occasion of that surprise visit the father and the mother of the child were there, and the child had been received and cared for in such manner as was then held to be *usual* in the case of a *legitimate* offspring.

This evangelist felt assured, after the most careful inquiry, that the person who was to be the subject of his writing was the much welcomed first child of a devout couple in Israel, named Joseph and Mary. He then proceeds to narrate how that together this couple after "*her* purification,"—as the Sinaitic Syriac version reads correctly and also in accordance with its non-Virgin Birth idea of the facts—"brought" this child of theirs

¹ "According to general Syrian custom, in earliest infancy a child is not really clothed, it is only swaddled. Upon birth the infant is washed in tepid water . . . then . . . rubbed gently with salt pulverised in a stone mortar specially for the occasion. . . . Next . . . sprinkled with . . . a powder made of dried myrtle leaves,—and then swaddled." *A. M. Rihbany The Syrian Christ*, p. 21.

“up to Jerusalem to present him” as their firstborn child “to Jehovah.”¹ This Sinaitic Syriac version is also very explicit later that together “Joseph and Mary . . . had performed in the Temple everything *to the first-born* which the Law ordains.”² It leaves it in no doubt that they were a newly married couple with their first child.

Again, the evangelist tells how that “when *the parents* brought in the little boy Jesus” in the customary manner, “*his father* kept wondering—and his mother” as well—“at the remarks about him,”³ which were made at the time by the revered Simeon, who seems to have been then a well known character in the Temple courts. He was probably a Rabbi of some distinction in his day. He could not have taken the child in his arms without being invited by the parents to do so, and on being invited to do so, as a Rabbi, he would feel that the honour was conferred on him and not on the child.⁴ The child’s

¹ Luke ii. 22; cf. Num. xviii. 15f.

² Luke ii. 39.

³ Luke ii. 27, 33. See below pages 93ff.

⁴ A friend of the writer’s was present at a ceremony, when a very distinguished Rabbi held the child. He remarked to a Rabbi friend, “What an honour to be held by so great a Rabbi!” To this remark he received the immediate answer, “On the contrary, the honour is not the child’s, but the Rabbi’s.”

father, who would be the one to give the invitation to hold the child, was as much impressed by the Rabbi's remarks on the occasion as was the mother.

Yet again, this evangelist points out that "his parents," in harmony with Hillel's idea that the women in Israel should avail themselves of the privilege of attending, "were in the habit of going each year to Jerusalem to the feast of the Passover."¹ They had taken this boy of theirs there "at the age of twelve,"²—the age at which he would be expected in a devout home like his to shoulder his own full responsibility under the Law. He was among the missing when the home-going caravan of folk, making in their direction that day, halted for the night a short way out of the city.³ They then discovered that "Jesus the boy"—that boy of theirs, whom the one had presumed was with the other—"was a-staying behind in Jerusalem." He had done so without their knowledge or

¹ Luke ii. 41.

² Luke ii. 42.

³ "The first day's march by caravan was always a short distance, because these large and confused assemblies were often late in starting. On the main roads round Jerusalem are ruined khans, only a few miles from the city, which mark the first 'day's march.' El-Birch has such a ruin. It was here that the Nazareth caravans rested and spent the night before setting off in earnest on the following morning." *H. V. Morton, In the Steps of the Master*, p. 149.

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consent. Others, possibly, might have known about it, but "*his parents* did not know."¹

They had left him free to do as he liked in the city. When, after a long hunt among the caravan folk and elsewhere, perhaps on the road, they found this newly made "son of the Law" on the Temple terrace listening to members of the Sanhedrin giving public instruction to earnest minded pupils seated on the ground in a semi-circle at their feet, his mother said to him, "Child! Why did you so to *us*? Look! *your father* and I in distress are seeking you."^{2 3}

No words could make it clearer than do these that this doctor evangelist knew that the subject of his Gospel was Joseph's son. For him after a most thorough inquiry, such as some slander had unfortunately necessitated, there could be only one answer to the

¹ Luke ii. 43.

² Luke ii. 48.

³ Note also how very natural the reply of the lad actually was. He said, "Why did you keep looking" here, there, and everywhere "for me? Did you not know" very well "that in the house of my Father I must be?" (Luke ii. 49). In their home Father seems to have been a well understood name for God. The reply was in the spirit and with a reference much the same as *Berachoth* 28b, "I thank Thee, my God, God of my fathers, that Thou hast set my lot among those who abide in the Synagogues and Schools, not among those who frequent the theatre and the circus." There were such attractions in and about Jerusalem at this time.

question, "Is not this a son of Joseph?"¹ It was the obvious one. His authority for this answer, too, he did not keep a secret. In reference to the visit of the shepherds and their story on the occasion he has allowed it to be recorded that "Mary used to retain all" such "things as these, turning" them "over in her mind."² Again, at the close of the story of the finding of the boy Jesus within the Temple buildings, having instruction in the duties involved in his acceptance of the yoke of the Law,³ the remark is made, "And his mother used to retain all these things in her mind."⁴ His authority, then, for the view which he himself obviously took, was, directly or indirectly, Mary's own recollection of the relevant circumstances of the case.

The evangelist, it is clear, was drawing a parallel between John and Jesus. Of *John* he had said, "And all hearers," of what was

¹ Luke iv. 22.

² Luke ii. 19.

³ A "house of Study" was "usually attached . . . to the synagogues. . . . No doubt they grew out of assemblies in private houses . . . which probably still continued to be used in some cases for this purpose. In Jerusalem the Temple (i.e., the colonnades or some other space of the outer court) was often so utilised. . . . Thus the famous scribes and 'doctors of the Law' taught. . . . Questions, asked and answered by teacher and disciple alike, . . . were the methods employed." *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, coll. 1200f.

⁴ Luke ii. 51.

being rumoured in the highlands of Judaea, "kept all such things in their mind, remarking, 'What then shall this little boy be?' for indeed Jehovah's hand was with him."¹ It was recognised by them that in many respects God was helping him. Of *Jesus* he had told how "the little boy was growing up and getting stronger," and how that at the same time he was known to have been "becoming full of a wisdom" of the very sort which would cheer the souls of devout Hebrew parents such as his were. "And God's favour was on him."² For his age the lad was very religious. He had already a religious experience of some real worth.

Again, of *John* he had said, "And the little boy was growing up and getting stronger in spirit." Probably by this time having lost by death both his father and his mother, who were not young when he was born to them, he grew up with a spirit which became every day stronger in him, and fitted him to face life very much alone. So "was he in out-of-the-way parts of the country, till the day" of his entrance on public life as a prophet of the Lord. With no one to take *him* to the Temple each year at the feast of the Passover, he spent his boyhood, and afterward his

¹ Luke i. 66.

² Luke ii. 40.

young manhood, in the outlying districts of the land, until the time "of his public appearance in Israel."¹ And of *Jesus* he had said that in these years he "was making progress in the wisdom,"² that is, in the orthodox religious life and conduct of his people. That was then as obvious to anyone as was his advance in "age." He grew, "too, in favour," such as a devout young person might expect both "from God and people"³ of Hebrew upbringing like himself. As far as Jehovah and His worshippers were concerned, it was beyond doubt that he was then proving himself increasingly satisfactory.

In pursuance of this very parallel still further, the evangelist next endeavoured to do some justice to John as a prophet of Jehovah's inspiring in Israel. But yet for him the climax of the public service of John to his people was the bringing of this *Jesus* into the movement which he himself had so ably initiated in the interests of a new Israel. Ere long John himself was put in prison, and

¹ Luke i. 80.

² Compare what *R. Kittel* says of *Jesus son of Sirach*, "His ideal is *Wisdom*; but there is no doubt what manner of wisdom he means; it is the wisdom of the *scribes*, and his house was little else than the school-house. All, it is true, may share in wisdom, but those who fear *Yahweh* possess wisdom from the cradle. Hence, too, all the wisdom of Greece cannot equal the Law of God." *The Religion of the People of Israel*, p. 210.

³ Luke ii. 52.

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that, too, under circumstances which gave him little or no prospect of ever coming out again alive. Jesus turned out to be the only one of his disciples who at that time had proved himself capable of straight away shouldering the responsibility of the leadership of the movement. Jesus was left to carry on as leader of the new religious enterprise in Israel.¹

Before going forward with his story of this great religious venture now under the competent leadership of this Jesus, it is very noticeable that the evangelist took the trouble to write up for the reader an abstract from the private and real genealogy² of the father of his hero, or else he retained it after he had written out his translation of material which had come to hand later. With the usual honesty of one who had begun his work with the profession of having gone into all things "carefully,"³ he prefixed the whole of this genealogy, so it seems, with the

¹ Cf. Luke iii. 1-20.

² The genealogy, both here and in Matthew i, must have been authentic and verifiable for some generations immediately behind Joseph. Beyond that an indefinite family tradition has been utilised for a symbolic purpose. The symbolism is rather more obvious in Luke than in Matthew. The latter is satisfied to suggest his excellent family connections in Israel. The former goes farther and suggests his place in the family of God, the first born of many brethren,—a brotherhood without any national distinctions.

³ Luke i. 2.

significant words, "as it was usually thought." This phrase, if it be retained as belonging to the original text of the Gospel,¹ must be held to apply to the whole genealogy, which here begins with "Joseph" and has its climax in "God." By this climax, which he purposely supplied to the genealogy, he very cleverly suggested to the reader the real theme of his book. The phrase particularly in question, if it be retained, must then be taken to reveal both the care and the modesty with which an educated convert like Luke was essaying to present his subject.

The theme of his book was to be one called Jesus "a son (as it was thought) of Joseph . . . of David . . . of Abram . . . of God."² He was going to tell what he had learned about this particular Jesus, who was a son of one called Joseph, a man of undoubtedly fine Jewish ancestry, and supremely the man of God—so men thought.³

¹ J. Moffatt suggests that this phrase and some other things in Luke i-iii are due to the fact that underlying the Greek text here is "an early Palestinian source which Luke has worked over, perhaps inserting." *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, p. 267.

² Luke iii, 23, 31, 34, 38.

³ "Pedigrees in the possession of private families would be carefully concealed. . . . It is clear from Josephus that, if Herod made the attempt, he did not succeed in destroying even all public records. Jews are very tenacious of their genealogies; and a decree to destroy such things would be

“The Holy One, blessed be He, says to man, ‘Behold, I am pure, My abode is pure, My ministers are pure, and the soul I give you is pure. If you return it to Me in the same state of purity that I gave it to you, well and good.’”¹ This Jesus had been given his soul pure from God, as had others theirs. He had also been able to meet the great requirement of the divine Giver by keeping pure His most precious gift.² So, at any rate, men, who had had the opportunity and the privilege of knowing most about him, thought. To them this man—an Israelite as much on his father’s as on his mother’s side—had proved himself to be Israel’s supreme saint. It was this real Israelite whom this Gentile convert was now eager to make the theme of his book.

evaded in every possible way. . . . It is not probable that Joseph was the only surviving descendant of David who was known to be such. But it is likely enough that all such persons were in humble positions,” so, for example, later, Domitian on inquiry found the grandsons of Judas the brother of Jesus to be. *A. Plummer, The Gospel According to S. Luke*, p. 102. See also above, page 21, notes ¹ and ²; and below, pages 59, notes ² and ³, and 60, note ¹.

¹ *Leviticus R. xviii. 1*; cf. *Niddah 30b*.

² Compare the following:—“A child aged one year who has not tasted sin” (*Joma 22b*). “Happy the man whose hour of death is like the hour of his birth; as at his birth he is free of sin, so at his death may he be free of sin” (*p. Berachoth 4b*). “Give it back to Him as He gave it to you, in a condition of purity” (*Shabbath 152b*). Cf. Heb. iv. 15, “one . . . in all points tempted . . . without sin.”

CHAPTER III

THE EVANGELIST'S INFORMATION ON
THE ANCESTRY QUESTION

“There are three partners in the production of the human being: the Holy One, blessed be He, the father and the mother.”

(*Niddah* 31a.)

CHAPTER III

THE EVANGELIST'S INFORMATION ON THE ANCESTRY QUESTION

THE Matthaean evangelist, to begin with, boldly tabled "the roll of the origin of Jesus," who by some Jewish people, at any rate, had come to be held in esteem as "the Anointed," *par excellence*, and who had every right to be regarded as a man of first rate ancestral connections in Israel—"the son of David, the son of Abram."¹ By this abstract from the legal family roll² he evidently intended also to leave it in no doubt that this Jesus was Joseph's son.³ In his day this was the customary method of dealing with persons who were going about busying themselves calumniating one who had in some way obtained a measure of enviable publicity.

¹ Matt. i. 1.

² *Ad. Merx* and other scholars have advocated "that it is based upon an actual birth register, which has been edited by the compiler. . . . It may be conceded that the names given of Joseph's immediate ancestors are probably based upon a real tradition." *G. H. Box, St. Matthew*, p. 72.

³ "If Jesus was not the son of Joseph, the genealogy is worthless and pointless. The genealogy was drawn up in a quarter and at a time in which the belief that Jesus was Joseph's son still existed." *C. G. Montefiore, The Synoptic Gospels*, Vol. II, p. 3. See above, page 55, note³.

To the evangelist's own satisfaction, which he expected his reader to share with him, it was capable of proof—and that, too, probably by reference to the available public records, as in the case of Josephus¹—that the Jesus whose teaching, it was held by him, was of some real significance for Jewish trained folk like himself, was a true Israelite. Actually he had sprung from one of the best connected of Jewish families. His father was one called Joseph. The essential points in his genealogy were, "Abram begat Isaac . . . David begat Solomon . . . Jacob begat Joseph. Joseph . . . begat Jesus."² So reads the Sinaitic Syriac version.

Some other orthodox circles, besides those which were served by the Sinaitic Syriac version, also enjoyed freedom from the direct influence of Greek minded ecclesiasticism within the early Church. Because of their Semitic locality they reveal themselves as having been much more capable of discerning the true facts of the case than were some people of Hellenistic upbringing. Both a Palestinian Syriac lectionary and the Arabic

¹ "The family from which I am derived is not an ignoble one, . . . Thus have I set down the genealogy of my family as I have found it described in the public records, and so bid adieu to those who calumniate me." *The Life of Flavius Josephus*, I.

² Matt. i. 2, 6, 16. See note ², page 54, above.

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translation of Tatian's Syriac Diatessaron have texts to the effect that Joseph was he from whom Jesus was begotten. This Palestinian Syriac lectionary, it is held by experts on the subject, had a text of good quality,¹ and Tatian's work, it is also held by them, rested on a Greek text of possibly an earlier date than the middle of the second century.² The former reads, "Joseph the husband of Mary, him from whom was born Jesus." The latter reads, either, "Joseph who from her begat Jesus the Anointed," or, "Joseph from whom was born Jesus the Anointed."³

It has also been acknowledged—even by the opponents of the view of the facts which the present writer is urging on the attention of the reader as the correct one—that as far as grammar is concerned the present Greek

¹ This is a complete Gospel lectionary which was discovered in 1892 by Mrs. Lewis. "The early editors referred it to the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and to a relatively ancient date, . . . as high as the second century; but Mr. Burkitt has demonstrated that it is of Antiochian origin, that it probably originated in the sixth century. . . . Its text is of good quality, though somewhat mixed in character." *F. G. Kenyon, Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, pp. 168ff.

² *Tatian* was "an Assyrian Christian" who "compiled about the year 170 a Gospel narrative, by a process of selection and harmonisation, from the four canonical Gospels." This work "the *Diatessaron*, so far as we can discover its original form, provides us with a text which must go back to Greek MSS. of at least the middle of the second century, and possibly much earlier." *F. G. Kenyon, Handbook* cited above., pp. 148ff.

³ Matt. i. 16.

text here need not be taken to mean anything other than what these Syriac authorities say so plainly. That is to say that, but for an ecclesiastically imposed context, no one would have taken it to signify anything else. Moreover, at a very early date a Jew, who was in controversy with a Christian on the very point, on his part contended—and rightly, too, as it has now been admitted—that this very Greek text said that Joseph begat Jesus from Mary. His position was, “It says he begat (him) from Mary.”¹ Consequently the evangelist’s own intention was to make it quite clear to his readers that Joseph was really and truly “the husband of Mary from out of whom was begotten Jesus,”—the particular Jesus “who is called the Anointed”²—the Jesus who among his followers had come to be spoken of as “the Consecrated,”³ *par excellence*.

¹ In the *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila* the words in question are quoted twice very loosely and once accurately. It is in reference to this last that the Jew in the controversy makes the remark.

² Matt. i. 16.

³ In Hebrew circles “an anointed one” might be either a king or a priest or a prophet or a saint. By the beginning of our era “the Anointed One” had established itself as a technical term for the much hoped for national hero, and that of course without forgetting the essential idea of the term, namely, consecration to the doing of the revealed will of God in the Law. When all Judaistic elements were filtered out of the term, it was with this idea of complete consecration to God in mind that it was regularly used of Jesus. Each of

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The evangelist then continued his story in simple Hebrew fashion. "His mother Mary having been betrothed to Joseph"—that is, when Mary had gone through the whole procedure, which was then thought to be necessary among her people, of being properly wedded to Joseph—when actually she had got beyond betrothed status¹ in her relationship to him, "she was found with child of holy spirit."²

In making this very pointed note about the exact time and the precise nature of her conception, probably this evangelist had in mind the same sort of rumour³ as had led his fellow evangelist Luke first to get, and then to give, the proper version of the manger incident. The facts, as he had gathered them to be, were that Mary was not a casual acquaintance of Joseph, but was according to Hebrew law his properly married wife,

his followers, too, was expected "to live" as "an anointed one"—"a consecrated one" after the pattern of the Master and by his inspiration. See, for example, Paul's words in Phil. i. 21 and elsewhere.

¹ Alternatively, since the bill of betrothal conferred the status of wife, which could not be taken away again except by a bill of divorcement, greater intimacy during betrothal may have been customary in Galilee than in Judaea. At this time plebeian or town Jews were monogamous, but patrician or country Jews still practised polygamy. See *L. Finkelstein, Akiba, Scholar, Saint and Martyr*, p. 101, also note ² page 38 above.

² Matt. i. 18.

³ See above, note ¹, page 46.

and her conception was as every devout Hebrew wife's conception was thought to be. It was of Jehovah's goodness and by the power of His spirit. At prayer, "while he was thinking of this" happy circumstance, Joseph had in some form the prayer-time experience of "Jehovah's angel"—an experience which seems always to have occasioned a measure of fear. "Do not fear . . . for," said the angel—which was on such occasions the usual formula for the introduction of the assurance that the purpose of the angel's coming was a beneficent one, that what had been previously prayed for had been granted by God—"there is offspring in her of holy spirit."¹ The good man was glad to know that his young wife was on the way to motherhood, as that was desired and understood in devout Hebrew circles.

They both had wanted "a son"² for their firstborn.³ So here it is to be understood that the husband had been praying that the sacred offspring now in her might be a boy. He was now assured that it would be—"and she shall give birth to a son,"⁴ continued the

¹ Matt. i. 20.

² Cf. Luke i. 31.

³ See the quotation from *Baba Bathra* which is given in note⁴ on page 16 above.

⁴ Matt. i. 21. See below, pages 81 f.

angel. It was with this conviction that Joseph continued his prayerful "reverie."¹

His old friend Zacharias quite recently had set the example of not giving the first baby his father's name. Joseph and his wife, it seems, were among the enthusiasts of their day who were looking for the coming of a new Israel, such as would be more pleasing to Jehovah than the Israel they knew. They very sincerely hoped that their son would be so also. In their sacred books Joshua was the patron saint of all those who were waging a holy war against any and all forms of paganism in Israel. Joseph, therefore, there and then made up his mind that he would call their little boy Joshua²—"Jesus"³—with the pious hope in his soul that this boy of theirs would grow up and live to help on the divine cause of removing such "sins" from the life of "his own people,"⁴ Israel, thereby averting Divine judgment from some of them and securing for

¹ Matt. i. 20, cf. ii. 12f., 22; xxvii. 19; the waking dream of one who from very joy or from worry—as circumstances might be—was unable to get much sleep at night.

² Cf. Heb. iv. 8.

³ This name was very popular in certain circles. It was the name of the writer of *Sirach*. See the prologue to that book, verse 5. At this time *Sirach* was popular and later it only just missed a place in the Palestinian Canon of the Old Testament. Jesus reveals that he often had this book in mind. It may have been popular in his home circle. See the present writer's, *What Jesus Read, His Dependence and Independence*, pp. 99-103.

⁴ Matt. i. 21.

them a place in God's Kingdom. So when the child was born, and they found themselves in possession of what they wanted more particularly, namely, a little *boy*, "he called his name Jesus."¹ This name for the child was also his wife's choice.²

A person of a non-Hebrew type of mind, who could refer to "the Jews"³ in a manner as detached as that of Pilate and his subordinates, has worked over this simple story, as probably he has done other⁴ stories in this Gospel. Here the original story was probably written in what was by then old-fashioned Hebrew.⁵ This old narrative the evangelist had translated. But this other person, whoever he was, had misunderstood the reference to betrothal, and the allusion to conception "of holy spirit." The ambiguity of the tenses may also have misled him into, or given him his opportunity of, imposing his views on the story.

Anyhow, this individual professed to take up the subject of the origin of this Jesus from

¹ Matt. i. 25.

² Cf. Luke i. 31.

³ Matt. ii. 2, cf. xxvii. 11, 29, 37.

⁴ Matt. xxviii. 15.

⁵ Concerning "the genealogical table" *C. C. Torrey* remarks, "The translator . . . made his own transliteration of the names from the Semitic text before him." On the play on words in verse 21—*Yeshua* (Jesus) and *yoshi'a* (shall save)—he says, "The play on words (at least) in this verse must have been in 'the holy tongue' Hebrew, not Aramaic." *The Four Gospels, A New Translation*, pp. 289f.

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quite an independent point of view. He was not interested in the plea for genuine Hebrew parentage,¹ which the original compiler of the genealogy had in mind. Omitting the name Jesus altogether he begins with the utmost emphasis, as if he had something supremely important to say in addition to what had been said quite plainly—"But as regards the Anointed the origin" actually "was as follows."²

Through his misunderstanding, or misconstruction, of the evangelist's version of the original story, he took it, or made it appear, that to Joseph there seemed to be something, which from his point of view, at any rate, was seriously wrong. There were signs of pregnancy "before they had consummated the marriage."³ Consequently, "not wanting to make a public example of her" by stating a case against her in court, "he had made up his mind by a private process"⁴

¹ G. H. Box remarks, "The nativity stories are the most intensely Jewish parts of the N.T. They are primitive in character, and must have assumed their present form in Palestinian and Jewish-Christian circles," *St. Matthew*, p. 78. Apart from the Virgin Birth idea in the present Greek text this is true, but not otherwise. "In the large amount of Jewish pre-Christian material that we possess there is not a trace of the belief." A. H. McNeile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 12.

² Matt. i. 18.

³ Matt. i. 18.

⁴ The narrative is here very un-Jewish. There could be no legal dissolution of the marriage by an unwitnessed mutual

to divorce her.”¹ Further, he held that Joseph took some persuading “to take to Mary” as a faithful “wife,”² and to undertake the full responsibility of publicly acknowledging the child as a lawfully born member of his family by giving the child a name.³ It is presumed that he knew that the child, that was on the way, was not his. At last, however, by angelic constraint “he took to his wife,”⁴ and in due course he shouldered the responsibility of naming the child,⁵ as if it were his own, though he knew all the time that it was not.

As the result of this transformation of the original story, the reader is now being asked

arrangement. A case in court against a married woman would have been very unusual. “Divorce has always been a private act. No public act of divorce exists. The . . . bill of divorce . . . never contains reasons for the divorce. Two witnesses are only necessary that they may state that” the bill of divorce “was really handed over by *this* man to *this* woman . . . doubts about the formal legality of an act of divorce which arose *afterwards* . . . could become a reason for hearing the decision in a court of justice. Some Rabbis believed that no husband would be likely to resort to a measure which would expose his former wife to the shame of having to do with a court of justice.” So *G. Dalman, Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 775b.

Further, a case of adultery against the woman was difficult to state in court and to prove, since witnesses of the very act were required. The assumption even of the Greek text here is that Joseph was not in a position to produce the necessary witnesses. Cf. John viii. 4, “They say to him, This woman was caught in the act committing adultery.”

¹ Matt. i. 19. ² Matt. i. 20. ³ Matt. i. 21.

⁴ Matt. i. 24. ⁵ Matt. i. 25.

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to believe that there was all this play-acting on the part of Joseph in the interest of some supposed divine purpose. But that is not all. Contrary to Hebrew custom this misinterpreter of the original story has turned back and annotated the genealogy, which the evangelist himself had supplied for his entirely different purpose, with the names of women,—and such women, too, three of them women of doubtful character and one a foreigner, “Tamar . . . Rahab . . . Ruth . . . Uriah's”¹ widow—as if they could ever be taken seriously to illustrate the rôle of Mary, even as he was imagining it to have been. It is to be allowed that some Rabbinical handling of these characters² may have made it easier than now appears for him to have used them here. But even so, this is the method of one who is desperate for any sort of argument that can be brought forth to bolster up a theory to which he finds himself far too publicly committed to withdraw again without incurring to himself some irreparable loss of prestige.

As regards the quotation from the prophet,

¹ Matt. i. 35f.

² Heb. xi. 31, James ii. 25, also *Megillah* 14b, “Eight prophets who were at the same time priests, sprang from Rahab; and they are these—Neriaah, Baruch, Seraiah, Maaseiah, Jeremiah, Hilkiah, Hanameel, and Shallum.”

in view of the name, Jesus, the evangelist might have been expected to have chosen a passage from the book of Joshua. His preacher's book of texts¹ to be used in propaganda work would, however, influence him, and there can be little doubt that the point for him in the passage, which is here quoted, could have been felt to have been in nothing else than in the name, "Immanuel."² At the moment for him the only matter in mind was the name of the child.³

The original utterance on the lips of the prophet himself was to the effect that a child to whom was given so exalted a name—a fashion, so the prophet thought, of a too readily optimistic generation—through the iniquitous policy of others, would not have the chance in life such as his name would make one expect him to have. In that sense it was easy of application to Jesus who, as the evangelist among other things wished to shew, had been the victim of an iniquitous policy. More probably, however, he had only the name

¹ The *Testimonia* was a collection of testimonies or passages from the Old Testament which were then regarded as prophecies of the life of him who had come to be accepted by them as the Anointed.

² Matt. i. 23, cf. Isa. vii. 14.

³ Contrast *A. Harnack's* theory that the Septuagint form of the prophet's words gave rise to the belief in the Virgin Birth.

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in mind at the time, when he made the quotation. In a community such as was native to him, in which it was possible for a godly mother to be referred to as "the Glory of God" or "the *Shechinah*,"¹ the Jewish Christian evangelist's meaning is not difficult to guess.

As the quotation now stands here in the Greek, it is the only quotation in the first two chapters of this Gospel which might be made to carry a peculiar application arising out of the terminology of the Septuagint version. If the evangelist himself put it here in just this form, and the crucial word was really as clear in meaning as it has been usually made out to be, then he gave the redactor a very good chance to impose his view on the narrative. A glance, however, at the form of the other quotations in these two chapters makes it unlikely that he himself would take over from the Septuagint. He seems to have trusted to his own free translation.

¹ It is recorded of *Rabbi Joseph* that "when he heard his mother's footsteps he used to exclaim, 'I stand up before the *Shechinah*'" (*Kiddushin* 31b). *I. Abrahams* renders this saying, "I will arise before *the Glory of God*." See *The Glory of God*, p. 11. In such an association the ex-Rabbi Paul should be read, for example, "All have sinned and come short of *the Glory of God*" (Rom. iii. 23), "and let us boast in hope of *the Glory of God*" (Rom. v. 2), "to enlightenment with the knowledge of *the Glory of God* (as it is) in the face of the Consecrated One" (2 Cor. iv. 6).

In that case the Septuagint reference here to a "virgin"¹ was part of the propagandist's stock in trade. He may have substituted this rendering for that of the evangelist, whose Palestinian upbringing would have made him more careful. If, however, the evangelist himself permitted the use of the word, it could not have meant more to him than a woman who was capable of having, but had not yet had, her first child. That, indeed, very probably was its real emphasis in the Septuagint, and not whether or not the woman, who had not yet had her first child, had had the marriage consummated.²

In view of such use of the Septuagint by early Christian propagandists it is not at all surprising that Aquila,³ for the special use

¹ Matt. i. 21.

² The Hebrew *'almah* in Isaiah vii. 14 has in mind the idea of being "ripe sexually," and hence is to be rendered "young woman," it being left to the context to determine as to whether she is to be thought to be a "maid" or a "newly married" young woman. See *W. Gesenius, BDB, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 761b. The Greek word, *parthenos*, which in the Septuagint translates this Hebrew word, and its derivatives, probably had a similar reference, and a like variety of meaning according to context. In Genesis xxxiv. 3, where it translates the Hebrew *na'arah*, "girl, damsel," virginity is out of the question. Compare also note * on page 20 above.

³ *Aquila* hailed from Pontus. He was a wealthy and learned proselyte. He was the friend and disciple of *R. Akiba* and was very well received at Yabneh. See note * on page 111 below. He was very much interested in any opportunity for the

of Hellenistic Jews, in the reign of Hadrian¹ made a pedantically literal translation of the Old Testament into Greek. Among other things he avoided here the ambiguous word of the Septuagint. He translated the Hebrew word clearly and simply by *neanis*, "a young woman." The original reference, he made clear, was to a girl-wife.

A good case has been put forward for the Church at Antioch, in Syria, as the Church in whose service the Gospel according to Matthew was first circulated.² Its author besides being familiar with the Galilean version of the sayings of Jesus,—as was also Luke,—felt himself to be the custodian of that type of tradition, which is known to have been popular among the more Jewish-minded of the followers of Jesus. If at the time of writing³ he had come to reside near Antioch, he may well have felt the call to serve the

restoration of Jerusalem and the re-commencement of the Temple services.

¹ A.D. 117-138.

² "In the Church of Antioch, a city with an enormous Jewish population, we seem to have just the atmosphere of the Gospel of Matthew, which, though frankly recognising that Christianity is for all nations, is yet saturated with Jewish feeling, preserves so many sayings of a particularist Jewish character, and altogether is less touched by the spirit of Paul than any other book in the New Testament." *B. H. Streeter, The Four Gospels*, p. 504.

³ *B. H. Streeter* suggests A.D. 85.

Church there by uniting these two strains in his Master's teaching. For a generation or more sides had been taken there, according as one element or the other was given the greater emphasis.

Probably some years after the publication of this Gospel, in the reign of the Emperor Trajan,¹ one called Ignatius² was the fanatical bishop or pastor of that Church. He quotes or alludes to this Gospel more than he does to any other. In his correspondence he manifests a bitter antagonism to Judaism, and says such things as "Christianity did not base its faith on Judaism, but Judaism on Christianity."³

Among Church leaders of his day this man stood alone in his fervent advocacy of the birth of Jesus from a virgin. He could not bear to think of him as the son of Jewish parents. He could not very well get rid of the mother without surrendering to a type of teaching which was appearing then in some

¹ A.D. 98-117.

² "What was the country in which he was born, or who were his parents, we know not. It seems probable, from some expressions in his writings, that he was brought up as a heathen and converted in mature life. Upon the death of Euodias he was chosen Bishop of Antioch, the metropolis of Syria." *The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature, The Apostolic Fathers, Part II*, p. 58.

³ To the *Magnesians* x. 3.

quarters, and which made the humanity of Jesus "only a semblance"—a "phantom"¹ humanity. That he had no mind to do. But he really thought that it was necessary to believe that Jesus had no real father. Time and again he returns to his theme, as if it were much on his own mind, and much also in the minds of those to whom he was writing. He gives one the impression that he had in front of him an audience who were not fully convinced on the point, and some of whom were not taking very kindly to what was to every one of Semitic upbringing an outrageous suggestion.

"Our God," he says, "Jesus the Christ, was conceived by Mary by the dispensation of God, 'as well as of the seed of David' as of the Holy Spirit."² He submits that "the *virginity* of Mary, and her giving birth were hidden from the Prince of this world, as was also the death of the Lord."³ He holds that Jesus "is in truth of the family of David according to the flesh, God's son by the will and power of God, truly born of a *virgin*."⁴ Hence he gives them warning, "Be deaf therefore when anyone speaks to you apart from

¹ To the *Trallians*, x. 1, To the *Smyrneans*, iii. 2.

² To the *Ephesians* xviii, 2.

³ To the *Ephesians* xix, 1.

⁴ To the *Smyrneans* i, 1.

Jesus Christ, who was of the family of David, and of Mary, who was truly born"¹—and by "truly born" he explains that he means "*born and yet not born, who is God in man*"²—so removing all ambiguity from the terms, as they were being used by him.³ Evidently to some people about him such an idea of being truly born was just a travesty of being truly born. But yet in his sense he thought it necessary for them "to be convinced of the *birth* and passion and resurrection."^{4 5}

Ignatius is usually quoted as evidence of the very early currency among Church people of this idea of the origin of Jesus. It seems very much more likely that he himself was the originator of the idea. His letters in that case reveal him as a propagandist for this Virgin Birth idea—a propagandist, too, who was not having things all his own way, even among the members of his own Church.

In one letter particularly—one, too, in

¹ To the *Trallians* ix, 1.

² To the *Ephesians* vii, 2.

³ See note ², page 72 above.

⁴ To the *Magnesians* xi, 1.

⁵ The following is representative of his position on the last two items:—"He truly suffered even as he also truly raised himself, not as some unbelievers say, that his Passion was merely in semblance . . . he was in the flesh even after the Resurrection . . . after his Resurrection he ate and drank with them as a being of flesh, although he was united in spirit to the Father" (To the *Smyrnaeans* ii. 1, iii. 1, 3).

which he is careful to say nothing directly or indirectly on the birth of Jesus from a virgin—he could not conceal a very strange nervousness about “the Gospel.” He uses this term here with convenient ambiguity. “Making the Gospel,” says he, “my refuge as the flesh of Jesus, and the Apostles as the presbytery of the Church. And the prophets . . . also have announced the Gospel . . . saints worthy of admiration . . . numbered together in the Gospel of the common hope.”¹ Later, too, in that same letter he could not conceal that he had had some trouble with people whose position had been that what was not to be found “in the originals,”² they refused to believe was “in the Gospel.”

He admits that he had tried to bring to bear upon them his authority as bishop, but it had been of no avail with them. To his

¹ To the *Philadelphians* v. 1f.

² Of the sentence here in view *K. Lake* writes, “The Greek, without punctuation, is as ambiguous as the English: ‘If I find it not in the charters,—in the Gospel I do not believe,’ or ‘If I find it not in the charters, in the Gospel, I do not believe.’ Probably the former should be preferred on the ground that ‘the charters’ probably means the Old Testament.” *The Apostolic Fathers*, p. 247. The present writer prefers to render *en tois archeiois* (To the *Philadelphians* viii. 2) as above and to take it that what are referred to are the original copies of the Gospel in use. Compare the rendering in *The Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature, The Apostolic Fathers*, Part II, p. 105, “Unless I find it written in the originals, I will not believe it to be written in the Gospel.”

dictatorial, "It is written," they had made reply, "It is so represented." In his letter, having admitted so much, he yet does no more than try to dispose of the matter by rhetoric. "But," he goes on to say, "to me the originals are Jesus Christ, the *untouched* originals—his cross and the death, also his resurrection and the faith which is through him." It is to be noted how, very adroitly and quite contrary to his habit, he here avoided any reference at all to "the birth" as belonging to these "*untouched* originals" of common Christian belief. He had placed himself in a very difficult position, and he was revealing then every appearance of being nervous as to whether, after all his assertion of his bishop's authority, he was going to come through with credit. His very prestige as a Church leader was at stake. Their prayers for him were very necessary, so he said—"in which matters I want by your prayer to be justified."¹

To the present writer the most natural interpretation of such references seems to be that Ignatius was hindering his opponents from getting at the original copy of the Gospel in use in the Church at Antioch at this time. The copy in use had very probably been adjusted to his own beliefs in several respects,

¹ To the *Philadelphians* viii. 2.

and especially in respect to the circumstances of the birth of Jesus.

Church leaders were in these early days quite as capable as those who were called "heretics" of adjusting the texts in use to their own views, and of getting rid of the earlier copies and even the originals, when it suited their purpose. In spite also of Irenaeus¹ it would seem as if there was some justification for Marcion's adoption of the plan of omission of certain things. Whatever his reasons for so doing, and however arbitrary his method of omission, it would not have been so easy for him to adopt that method of bringing texts into accordance with his own peculiar doctrines, if it had not been very generally known that others had not hesitated to make some insertions to bolster up their ideas. This tampering with early Church documents was unfortunately a habit alike of Church leaders and of heretics so-called.

It will have been noticed by the reader that

¹ *Irenaeus* says, "Marcion, rejecting the whole Gospel, or to say it better, cutting himself off in fact from the Gospel, boasts that he has a part of the Gospel." On this *C. R. Gregory* remarks:—"Marcion . . . did not boast that he had a 'part' of the Gospel. According to his conception of the case, what he had was the Gospel and the whole Gospel. What he rejected and cut out, that was not Gospel at all." *Canon and Text of the New Testament*, p. 150. Marcion flourished about the middle of the second century, Irenaeus during the last quarter of it.

in the chapter of Matthew's Gospel which is here under consideration, the Sinaitic Syriac version has revealed several serious divergences from the present Greek text, and that at these points the former has been preferred to the latter.

It is probable that that particular Syriac version does not furnish a full view of all the facts concerning the original text of the Gospel in use in the Church at Antioch. Unfortunately it has not entirely escaped the attention of orthodox scribes, who did their work under ecclesiastical orders and supervision. But even so, it is regarded by competent judges in such matters to be at present the best available witness for the old text in use at Antioch.¹ It is to be taken, then, as here affording real glimpses of what that old text must have been like, before Ignatius or somebody like him touched it in the interest of a view which might have occurred to a Greek trained mind, but never to one trained in the Hebrew tradition.

The truth here is not to be found in the

¹ *B. H. Streeter*, in grouping the earlier texts and in giving five groups of these older texts, names the fourth "an Antiochene, less adequately known to us through the Old Syriac." Elsewhere he refers to the Sinaitic Syriac version as that "which seems to represent the old text of Antioch." *The Four Gospels*, p. 145, cf. p. 71.

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present Greek text of the Gospel, but in a Greek text which lies behind that text, and to whose existence the Sinaitic Syriac version bears witness. That version clearly testifies to the presence of the non-Virgin Birth story of the origin of Jesus in that old text. The probability is that the story of the birth of Jesus in that old original of the Gospel in use in the Antioch Church services—the original which was demanded of Ignatius, and was not at the time being produced—gave no support at all to the Greek-inspired idea¹ of the Virgin Birth of God in man.

The Sinaitic Syriac version shews no knowledge at all of the ominous and crucial words,—that is, ominous and crucial if the Virgin Birth idea really sets forth the truth of the case—“he was not knowing her until”. With no such words interrupting its straightforward narrative it reads quite simply, “and she gave birth to a son to him.”² This accords perfectly with the words of the angel to Joseph, as these appear in this version. Here the angel is made to say with unmistakable

¹ Actually the idea was a partial and very clumsy concession to the very Gnostics whom he was anxious to defeat, who held that matter was inherently evil, and hence the redeeming Personality could not have soiled himself by taking a material body. *Ignatius* could go so far as to say that he had not defiled himself by having a human father.

² Matt. i. 25.

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clearness of meaning, "and she shall give birth to a son *to you*."¹

The report of the content of the vision of Joseph on the occasion, as it is given by the evangelist, may have some marks on it of a precision which was due to knowledge of the later career of the child. But historic truth is to be accorded at any rate to the assumption of responsibility for the naming of the child, as a good father in Israel should. To suggest that in so doing Joseph was just a play actor for God in a piece in which he had no vital part, was probably very far from the intention of the evangelist. He seems never to have come within sight of such a suggestion.

On the contrary, the evangelist made his own points clearly in favour of this Jesus, whose life and teaching he, as a fellow-countryman and disciple of his, wrote to commend. This particular Jesus was not the offspring of some nondescript people, as had been said in some quarters. The legal genealogy of his father could be produced. Mary was the wife of Joseph. Her conception was—as was the conception of every devout Hebrew wife—of holy spirit. In stepping forward in public, as he did, to name the little baby boy in accordance with the then prevailing custom of

¹ Matt. i. 21.

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his people, Joseph gave his child a good old-fashioned name—one which was apparently very much revered among folk of their outlook in Israel. It is a great pity that plain words so very much to the point, and in such real good Hebrew taste, should have been robbed of their first intention by the stupidity of a Greek-minded person in the early Church. It is very unfortunate that his authority was such as to suffice to set the early Church a-blundering.¹

This interpretation of the available data is incidentally—and because so incidentally, all the more powerfully—confirmed by the form of the questions about Jesus and his relatives, as these are made to appear in this very Gospel. Here one reads, “Is not this the *carpenter's* son? Is not his mother called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us?”²

It is to be observed that the evangelist, in here taking over material from Mark's Gospel, has chosen to put not “the carpenter,” as

¹ But for this unfortunate concession to Gnosticism (see previous note ¹ on page 81 above) the work of creed making in the early Christian Church might have gone forward on very different lines from those which resulted in the production of the great creeds of the fourth and fifth centuries.

² Matt. xiii. 55f.—Mark vi. 3.

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Mark himself has done, but “the *carpenter’s* son.” Yet again, and even more significantly, both of the old Syriac versions, either with or without a reference to the occupation of his father, here read, “Is not this *the son of Joseph?*”

The conclusion is obvious. The Matthaean evangelist never intended his introductory material to convey the idea that Jesus was not the son of Joseph.¹ To him the Jesus who was to be the subject of his writing was the sacred offspring of two very devout people in Israel, Joseph and Mary by name.

¹ Compare *Carl Clemen’s* theory that a story or a source, which said nothing at all about a virgin birth, has been so adapted by the evangelist as to be capable of conveying that idea.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVANGELIST'S ANSWER TO THE
NAZARETH CRITICISM

“For the sake of a living child only a day old the Sabbath may be desecrated, . . . in order that he may observe many Sabbaths afterwards.”

(Shabbath 130a.)

CHAPTER IV

THE EVANGELIST'S ANSWER TO THE NAZARETH CRITICISM

THIS Jesus, it was well known, had entered public life "from *Nazareth* of Galilee."¹ In his lifetime he was everywhere popularly referred to as "the prophet Jesus from *Nazareth* of Galilee."² Often, too, he was even addressed as "*Nazarene* Jesus."³ By some he was regularly spoken of as "Jesus *the Nazarene*,"⁴ or else more emphatically as "*the Nazarene*,"⁵—the then well known Nazarene.

His earliest followers, too, were quite frank about this connection of his with the small town of Nazareth in Galilee. So Peter preached in the courts of the Temple at Jerusalem with the utmost candour on this point. The subject of his preaching he left in no doubt. He made perfectly clear what particular Jesus he had in mind. It was "Jesus *the Nazarene*, a man publicly approved by God."⁶

¹ Mark i. 9, cf. Matt. iv. 13, Luke ii. 51, iv. 16.

² Matt. xxi. 11.

³ Mark i. 24.

⁴ Mark x. 47, cf. Mark. xvi. 6,—Matt. xxvi. 71.

⁵ Mark xiv. 67.

⁶ Acts ii. 22.

During his mission work among Israelites that converted fisherman from the north in his northern accent discoursed regularly "in the name of the consecrated¹ Jesus the Nazarene."² Even in front of strangers of non-Israelitish upbringing he spoke impressively on "Jesus," the one "*from Nazareth*," and how "God consecrated him."³ A man, too, of quite a different type among the early disciples was also caught saying, "Jesus *the Nazarene*—this man shall destroy this place."⁴ In view of the social, political and cultural cleavages⁵ of the time this method of making clear which Jesus was meant was remarkable.

Further, the early teaching of the disciples, which reached Saul of Tarsus at the Cilician Synagogue in Jerusalem, and converted him, was teaching associated emphatically with the name of "Jesus *the Nazarene*."⁶ To their Jewish contemporaries the disciples of this particular Jesus were "the sect of *the*

¹ See above note ³, page 62.

² Acts iii. 6, iv. 10.

³ Acts x. 38.

⁴ Acts vi. 14.

⁵ "Whatever light had pierced the darkness of the peasant mentality of this district (the province of Galilee) had come from the Pharisaic teachers, the scribes of Jerusalem . . . even when the Galilean accepted these teachings, he transformed them into ideals more in keeping with his own simplicity and naïveté." *L. Finkelstein, Akiba, Scholar, Saint and Martyr*, p. 13.

⁶ Acts xxii. 8, xxvi. 9.

Nazarenes."¹ "Nazarenes" was at the time their nickname in very orthodox Jewish circles. To these people this new religious movement in their midst was looked upon as the Nazarene split.

In the end this Nazareth connection of the leader of this new religious development in Israel gave its critics an opportunity. In days when the tribe of Judah and the district of Judaea were in favour once again² as the source and neighbourhood from whence the long looked-for national hero might be expected to arise, it was difficult for some to believe that "any good" such as that³ could "be from Nazareth," or indeed that any "prophet" could ever spring "from Galilee."⁴ ⁵ Hence the anxiety of this Gospel writer to establish the connection of the family of this Jesus with Davidic tradition and with Bethlehem was very natural.

¹ Acts xxiv. 5.

² See note ⁴ page 41 above.

³ "The inference, that the expression of Nathaniel . . . implies a lower state of the people of Nazareth, is unfounded. Even *Keim* points out that it only marks disbelief that the Messiah would come from such a place." *A. Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, p. 148, note ².

⁴ John i. 46, vii. 52.

⁵ Compare how that *Johanan ben Zakkai*, the head of the vanishing peace party in Jerusalem, realising the need for learning in the provinces, settled in Galilee. He got little response and in despair returned to the city, saying in his last address, "Galilee, Galilee, you hate the Torah; your end will be seizure by the Romans." (*p Shabbath 15d*).

In Israel Jewish sages had come to be a class to themselves. They not only "applied" themselves "to the fear of God," and set their "mind upon the Law of the Most High," but also searched "the wisdom of all the ancients," and were "occupied with the prophets of old." They gave heed to "the discourses of men of renown," and entered "into the deep things of parables." They searched "out the hidden meaning of proverbs," and were conversant "with the dark sayings of parables." They served "among great men," and appeared "before princes." They travelled "through the lands of the peoples," and tested "good and evil among men." From "God Most High" they were filled "with the spirit of understanding," and poured forth "wise sayings in double measure," the "secrets" of "counsel and knowledge."¹ Scribes of this type had been for a considerable time serious competitors of "the wise men of Babylon."²

The term "magi," "astrologers," notwithstanding, the wise men "from the East," who "in the days of Herod the king . . . presented themselves at Jerusalem,"³ were probably just such Jewish scribes and some

¹ Sirach, xxxix. 1-4, 6f.

² Dan. ii, 12, 14, 18, 24, 48, iv. 6, v. 7.

³ Matt. ii. 1.

distinguished proselytes from Babylon, from whence originated one of the Talmuds, which had for one of its titles, "the Talmud of the people of *the East*."¹ Babylonian Jews, many of whom excelled in learned accomplishments, already had been responsible for making current the expectation of an epoch-making birth. These visitors were obviously enthusiasts for a new national movement.

That they had come to Jerusalem very leisurely,² and not by a direct route, suggests that actually they were propagandists in the national interest. These were days when open-air talks were an educational institution, and fervent people like these travelled in bands to further religious ends. The hearts of these men were set upon a really thoroughbred king for their people. They wanted a ruler for their nation who should be a born Jew—one "who had been born a king."³ It was not at all unusual

¹ The two Talmuds bear the title of their native countries. "(A) The Palestinian Talmud, called the Talmud of Jerusalem . . . more correctly . . . 'the Talmud of (the children of) the Land of Israel,' 'the Talmud (or the *Gemara*) of (the people of) the West.' (B) The Babylonian Talmud . . . also known under the title of . . . 'the Talmud of the people of the East.'" *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. V, p. 64.

² The reference to "two years" probably throws more light on the duration of their propaganda on the way than on the age of the child Jesus at the time. See below, page 102.

³ Matt. ii. 2.

for Jews and even proselytes,¹ whose own home was far away from Palestine, to be more nationalist than were the Palestinians themselves. Even in Palestine there were noticeable differences, and Jerusalem was not usually the most out-and-out in the desire for full political rights in their own land for observers of the Law.

These men had been reading the signs of the times in the sky—a habit which was not unheard of in those days even among very orthodox Jews.² Some astronomical phenomenon had led them to the belief that they had seen “his star,”³ his angel or counterpart in the heavens.⁴ Consequently they had

¹ Compare the remarkable enthusiasm of *Aquila*, the famous proselyte of the early second century, for Jewish nationalist ideals. See note ² page 72 above. *These* proselytes may have been of the type which for long had stimulated the growth of the doctrine of the future life in Judaism. *J. H. Moulton, Early Zoroastrianism*, pp. 282–285.

² Astrology seems to have been a subject on which the opinion of the Rabbis was divided. The majority appear to have been against it. Yet even the saintly *R. Akiba* “worried very much over the matter” which “the astrologers foretold” about a daughter of his. See *Shabbath* 156b.

³ *Kepler* suggested a close conjunction of planets. A case has been attempted for the Morning Star. It seems likely that it was some star of which they alone had knowledge as expert astrologers. The star and all about its first appearance was obviously their own secret. It was not something that had previously caused a stir.

⁴ “I was brought up to believe that every human being had a star in heaven which held the secret of his destiny and which watched over him wherever he went.” *A. M. Rihbany, The Syrian Christ*, pp. 24f. Compare, “their angels in heaven,” *Matt. xviii. 10.*

undertaken this pilgrimage to the Holy City—also a very customary thing for enthusiasts in Israel then to do. On their arrival they made no small stir with their avowed intention to do homage to the infant king-to-be, if they could at all find him. They made it public that they were come “to prostrate” themselves “before him.”¹ Very naturally “the king, Herod,” on hearing of this extraordinary stir in the city about a full-blooded Jewish governor, such as he himself, he well knew, could not claim to be, “was upset, and all Jerusalem with him”²—the latter, of course, for reasons very different from those of the king. There would be some who approved, and some who were more careful, and, in public at least, disapproved of such commotion in the capital of Judaism.

This disturbance in Jerusalem created even in older prophetic people about the Temple courts an extraordinary enthusiasm. The national movement seemed now to be so within sight³ that one among them—a Simeon

¹ Matt. ii. 2.

² Matt. ii. 3.

³ Compare, later, the case of *R. Akiba*. “Akiba . . . would not give up the hope that his own generation would see the revelation of the Divine glory. . . . Forty years had in fact passed since the destruction of the Temple. The next forty were to be a happy Messianic prelude to the Future World. . . . Akiba himself did not long resist the contagion of Messian-

who may have been son of Hillel and father of Gamaliel—was thrilled with the idea that he might at any rate live to set eyes on the very infant who would grow up to be the national hero. "Holy spirit was upon him." He was carried away with prophetic fervour. For a while his habit had been to turn up in the Temple courts to look out for and to encourage couples who were bringing *boy* children for the prescribed ceremony. Now he probably became even more inquisitive than he had been about their ancestry. He gave it out that the oracle¹ "by the spirit of the Holy" was to the effect "not to see death till he should see the Anointed of Jehovah."²

The sight of a couple from Bethlehem—not necessarily poor because they had just offered a bird instead of a beast offering, which was the natural thing for ordinary people to do—very deeply moved him, as he "came in the spirit"—that is, with ecstasy—"toward the shrine."³ This may have been just after

ism. . . . He went so far as to encourage the popular delusion concerning the miraculous rôle to be played by the new leader." *L. Finkelstein, Akiba Scholar, Saint and Martyr*, pp. 220, 269.

¹ See note ¹ page 19. He may have asked for an oracular "yes" or "no" to the question, Shall I see the Anointed of Jehovah? and obtained "yes" in reply.

² Luke ii. 26.

³ Luke ii. 27.

he had received the oracular affirmative to his inquiry. As they stood before him with their little child, he put questions to them about their family connections in Israel, and as a result he was quite satisfied that the oracle at the shrine had not misled him. Simeon's demeanour at the time, also the translation into words of what he was seeing in his ecstasy—"My eyes saw" just now in vision "the deliverance from Thee, which Thou hadst got ready in front of all the peoples"¹—and still more his use of some recognisable thanksgiving for the near approach of Messianic times, as "*he*"—and no other²—"received" the little boy "into his arms and blessed God":³ all this set the old "prophetess Anna" chattering to patriotic folk. This old woman, who was probably of Galilaeian stock, "of the tribe of Asher . . . let her tongue wag about it to all who were expecting Jerusalem's liberation."⁴

This tumult of nationalist feeling became serious enough to move the king to enter into consultation with the governing body of the Jewish community. By this time the Sanhedrin had come to include not only the sacerdotal nobility, but also Pharisaic

¹ Luke ii. 30f.

² See above page 48.

³ Luke ii. 28.

⁴ Luke ii. 36, 38.

doctors of the Law.¹ These were summoned by Herod to a special session to discuss the topic of the hour, namely, "The Anointed." Herod made "all the priestly aristocracy and scribes of the people" to face the issue, "Where the Anointed is born,"² that is, if actually he is already born. As usual he was humouring the Sanhedrin for his own purposes.

Family lists of the people of Israel were known to have existed before the Exile. Many circumstances had contributed to give these lists even greater importance after the Exile. Consequently by this time—and in spite of the fact that possibly Herod had burnt some of the genealogies of the priests—the local archives were extensive and the records in them numerous. Some of them were ancient. They were supposed to be in the safe custody of the Sanhedrin. Reference might, therefore, be made to such available data to locate a particular family, when that was desirable.

Such procedure was not very likely to be

¹ During this period the Pharisees were strongly represented on the Sanhedrin. As the interpreters of Judaism the orthodox found them very acceptable. On certain occasions they defeated the policy of the Sadducees. Probably some of them might have done more than they did in that direction. The specific reference to them here may be taken to imply a stormy discussion. See *A. T. Robertson, The Pharisees and Jesus*, pp. 67, 98, 102f; also see below, note¹, page 98.

² Matt.ii. 4.

adopted on this occasion, except perhaps on a detail, after the main decision had been come to; for example, in estimating the personal risk to anyone at the place to which the men concerned might be sent, as the result of any verdict of the Sanhedrin. The previous question would have to be settled, namely, whether the Anointed was to come from a known or an unknown place.¹ Once the verdict had gone in favour of a known place, the rest would be decided by the operation of a Rabbinical interpretation of Scripture such as was then customary among the educated.

In the end the verdict of this Sanhedrin meeting, or of a number of meetings for the special purpose, was clear enough, namely, "In Bethlehem of Judaea,"² if anywhere at all. This was in accordance with the popular hope at the moment. Further, it was very good policy on the part of the Sanhedrin, since it would serve to get the chief agitators clear of Jerusalem. However much or little inquiry was actually behind their verdict, it implied a clear instruction to the ring-leaders of this nationalist uproar in the Holy

¹Cf. John vii. 27, "But this fellow—we actually know whence he is; but the Anointed—when he comes, no one gets to know whence he is."

² Matt. ii. 5.

City to be off elsewhere to get their heart's desire satisfied.

If Rabbinic procedure is here any guide, there must have been very extensive discussions before the decision of the majority emerged and was finally agreed upon as the finding which was to go to Herod.¹ In being instrumental in getting these propagandist pilgrims sent off elsewhere, the Sanhedrin must have hoped that the poor remnant of the old house of David would not be traceable, or if any trace of it were found, that their learned kinsmen would have gumption enough to cover it up again.

This Temple-building king, who was but a few weeks from his death, acted on this occasion according to his genius. His habit was at one and the same time to humour and to thwart his subjects. Hence, with this verdict of the Sanhedrin in his hands, he had a private meeting with the ringleaders of this out-and-out Jewish nationalism. He was careful to get from them the exact "time" and

¹ In these days Sanhedrin discussions were not always cases of Sadducees versus Pharisees. The Pharisees might be divided among themselves according as their sympathies were patrician or plebeian. The Shammaites especially were capable of taking advantage of nationalist fervour not only for political ends, but also to further their own social and religious programme. See *L. Finkelstein, Akiba, Scholar, Saint and Martyr*, pp. 39, 53; also see above note ¹, page 96.

day of the "first appearance" above the horizon of the ominous "star."¹ With profession of good wishes for their success, of which he hoped to hear from them soon, he sent them off, in accordance with the Sanhedrin's word to him, "to Bethlehem."²

As they left the city and turned south-east, "the star which they saw at its rising" and which may not have been continuously visible, was now right in front of them. On their approach to the city it had been at their backs. Now also it was much higher in the heavens than it had been at some appearances. So they made their way happily to the little town but a few miles off, and, after necessary inquiry, to "the place where there was"—so they thought—"the little boy" of their long search. To their devout imagination "the star"³ seemed to have led them to the very place, and then stopped to tell them to go no farther than this particular house in Bethlehem.

The couple in whom they found that they were to be interested, had moved from the caravanserai⁴—if that was where the

¹ Matt. ii. 7.

² Matt. ii. 8.

³ Matt. ii. 9.

⁴ "The ordinary khan was . . . a hollow square, open above, with arches round one or more of the sides within, and over these a series of rooms, approached by a stone stair. The rooms are for travellers; muleteers, animals, and baggage share the space and arches below." *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. II, p. 474. See further note², page 39 above.

birth took place. It was no place for an extended stay, even if very shortly afterward they got one of the upper rooms there. However, the man and his wife were now in "the house" which they had by this time been able to get. Perhaps it was a house which Joseph in the meantime had been able to build for himself on land belonging to his family inheritance in the district. Once in Bethlehem these fanatics had had no great difficulty in locating this the only home in that little township with a baby boy of the required Jewish stock, and right age, apparently.

Thereupon "they made no secret of their great joy."¹ On making the discovery they made a great demonstration outside the house. They then "entered the house," and "saw the little boy with Mary his mother." After they had been so far led inside, probably by the father, they went forward and "dropped down and prostrated themselves in front of him." Then in perfect Eastern fashion they unpacked tokens of love and loyalty, typical products of their land, which had been carried by them in the hope of seeing just such a baby *boy*—one with the necessary ancestry, so they had concluded. They offered

¹ Matt. ii. 10.

“to him gifts,” their votive gifts, which were more symbolical than valuable, “of gold and frankincense and myrrh.”¹ The occasion became a Messianic sacrament to their souls.

In their enthusiasm, however, these nationalist devotees had created a very awkward situation for a devout family of their people. This they soon realised to be the case. From the first Herod had probably not succeeded in deceiving them. The Sanhedrin were most likely relieved that such fanatics, who were always a source of embarrassment to them, had been piloted beyond the walls of the old city. They could not have gone, however, without some hints from at least some of the Jewish court not to come back again. Anyhow it was now clearer than ever what they should do. They had had a disturbed night over the matter,² and had consulted the oracle. “The oracle having answered” to their inquiry “*not* to wend their way up again” to the capital, “by another” and probably less circuitous “route” than that by which they had come, “they made their escape into their own district.”³ As quickly and as secretly as possible these

¹ Matt. ii. 11.

² See note ¹, page 65 above.

³ Matt. ii. 12.

educated fanatics in the national interest, these Jewish nationalists from Babylon, made their way home again. Their propaganda *en route* and their quest at the end of their journey had together taken them some "two years."¹

Very naturally in all the circumstances Joseph was put about concerning what had happened at his house door and inside the house. The sages may have told him the reason for their hurried and secret departure. But that apart, the demonstration at the house door and in the house had made him and his family dangerously conspicuous. These were days in which a few deaths² were but a trifle if thereby some supposed public interest was served. In the furtherance of Herod's policy of in satisfaction of his jealousy it mattered little that a few lives, whether

¹ Cf. Matt. ii. 16; see above page 91, note ¹.

² Cf. "The suspicions of Herod were excited. . . . Lured on by . . . perfidious playmates, the princely boy," Aristobulus, "joined in the" water "sport, and then . . . the wild band dipped and dived with him under the deep water; and in that fatal 'baptism' life was extinguished. . . . But there remained the aged Pontiff Hyrcanus . . . at the age of eighty the long and troubled life of the Asmonean Pontiff was cut off . . . Mariamne . . . reproached him with the murders of her brother and her grandfather . . . she went on to her execution. . . . There remained the two sons of Mariamne . . . the two young Princes were tortured, tried, and at last executed." *A. P. Stanley, Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*, Vol. III, pp. 373-378.

old or young, were ruthlessly brought to a close. Besides, there would be spies to contend with soon.

Joseph, therefore, prayed and the answer came. He must "stir himself, gather up the little boy and his mother, and take to his heels."¹ So the good man made off at once and travelled "by night," and not by the usual caravan route from Jerusalem "into Egypt," a stopping place on which was Bethlehem. He would prefer in such circumstances unfrequented paths across the Judæan highlands—a part of the country which, with its many limestone caves,² had always been friendly to fugitives. There also they had relatives.³ In this flight they had "escaped" as far as the border "into Egyptian territory,"⁴ when the news of Herod's death overtook

¹ Matt. ii. 13.

² The western range "is a long deep wall of limestone . . . it consolidates towards Bethel upon the narrow table-land of Judæa . . . the enormous cave of Khareitun" was "near Bethlehem. . . . You may travel for hours, and feel as solitary as at sea without a sail in sight." There is "no great trunk-road." *G. A. Smith, The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, pp. 47, 229, 316, 319. The early tradition that Jesus was born in a cave, which appears in several early Church writers, may reflect some of the actual circumstances of this taking of refuge in out-of-the-way parts—in the caves of this district.

³ The home of Zacharias and Elizabeth was in these parts; see Luke i. 39f, "the hill country" in "the province of Judæa,"—also above note ¹ page 32.

⁴ Matt. ii. 14.

them. Thereupon they felt the natural impulse to return again to their native land. Consequently—and that, too, almost immediately—they re-crossed the frontier “on to Israelite soil.”¹ They set foot again on Jewish territory.

Yet they knew quite well that “the life of the little boy”² was still in danger, and perhaps too, their own lives. They must have heard what had already befallen “the boys”³ of a few of their old neighbours in Bethlehem, since and because they had left so hurriedly. They did not forget that the spies would still be on the watch for their possible return after a while. Obviously, “the searchers for the life of the little boy”⁴ had to be thwarted somehow. Prayer left Joseph in no doubt whatever as to what he ought to do under the circumstances. He must give up his original intention altogether. He must not again attempt to set up home for himself on his family’s land at Bethlehem. Escape must be made “into the district of Galilee.”⁵ So he made tracks for his wife’s home town. He made for “Nazareth,”⁶ not Bethlehem.

This little highland town lay not far away from some of the main roads of the country.

¹ Matt. ii. 20.

² Matt. ii. 20.

³ Matt. ii. 16.

⁴ Matt. ii. 20.

⁵ Matt. ii. 22.

⁶ Matt. ii. 23.

It was a secluded spot without being too remote, and it had some importance as a priestly centre.¹ But most important of all, it was not situated in the political division, which had been assigned to "Archelaus"—a ruler who like "his father"² soon proved himself to be no amateur³ in the art of murder, if murder was at all likely to further his personal ambitions.

The fugitives probably travelled northward by the maritime plain. Actually this was not long after "they had completed all requirements of the Law of Jehovah." It was very shortly after the fulfilment of such religious obligations that they changed their

¹ "Although the stream of commerce between Acco and the East was divided into three channels, yet, as one of these passed through Nazareth, the quiet little town was not a stagnant pool of rustic seclusion. . . . Nazareth was also one of the great centres of Jewish Temple life. . . . The priests of the 'course' which was to be on duty always gathered in certain towns whence they went up in company to Jerusalem. . . . Nazareth was one of those priest-centres." *A. Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, p. 147.

² Matt. ii. 22.

³ At a Passover in Jerusalem, when Judas and Matthias, who had been slain by Herod, were being lamented, "he sent a regiment of armed men" among the people. When this move occasioned retaliations ending in "an assault upon the soldiers . . . he sent out the whole army upon them, and sent the horsemen to prevent those that had their tents without the Temple, and to kill such as ran away from the footmen when they thought themselves out of danger; which horsemen slew three thousand men, while the rest went to the neighbouring mountains." *Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*, Book XVII, Chapter IX, 3.

minds about settlement in Bethlehem. "They turned back into the Galilee" section of the land "into a town" that for long had come to be spoken of as "their own" town.¹

Not only Luke, but also the writer of Matthew's Gospel took the liberty of writing of Nazareth as "*their own town*"² or "*his native place*."³ This was not an unnatural liberty to take. It was "where he had been reared."⁴ The vacant "house" and the ancestral land at Bethlehem must have been appropriated by the governing authorities. An echo of this action on the part of the representatives of the king possibly should be heard in the recorded reference of Jesus himself to sacrifice of "a house" or "houses" and "property in land"⁵ by his own disciples in furtherance of the interests of the cause of God in the land. There is no suggestion anywhere that at a later time in his life Jesus had ever visited Bethlehem. There is not as much as a hint that at any time he ever made Bethlehem a subject of conversation with his followers.

He may have done so, of course, but if he ever did, the slightest reference to that talk

¹ Luke ii. 39; compare above pages 47f. ² Matt. xiii. 54.

³ Luke ii. 39. ⁴ Luke iv. 16.

⁵ Mark x. 29—Matt. xix. 29.

did not afterward seem worth while. Indeed from his point of view—opposed as he was to the popular idea of the Messiah as the son of David,¹ which seems to have had its local propagandists²—it was very good policy on his part to dissociate himself from Bethlehem. This policy of his seems also to have been understood by his disciples. As far as they were concerned he had a good measure of success in getting them to avoid any direct allusion to his Bethlehemite origin. It never appears in any record of their early preaching, nor in their early correspondence.³

Now, however, the evangelist himself on his part, for a clearly conceived purpose of his own, made the point very deliberately that this “Jesus was born in Bethlehem of

¹ On one occasion he resented it, when “Son of David” was called after him. This seems to be a reasonable explanation of the fact that the blind man, meaning no offence, had to call so often. On another occasion, in reference to the “Son of David” demonstration on his approach to Jerusalem, for which he took no responsibility, in Rabbinic fashion he ridiculed the idea. See Mark x. 47f—Matt. xx. 30f—Luke xviii. 38 f; Mark xii. 35ff.—Matt. xxii. 43ff.—Luke. xx. 41—44.

² See above, page 42.

³ The only reference to Bethlehem in the New Testament outside Matthew ii and Luke ii is in John vii. 42, where some are made to state the very objection which the Matthaean evangelist, it seems, was doing his best to answer:—“But some kept saying,” in argument to the contrary, “For no!—out of Galilee is the Anointed coming! Has not the Scripture said, ‘From out of the seed of David’ and ‘from Bethlehem’ there is coming the Anointed?”

Judaea . . . in Bethlehem of Judaea," he reiterates, ". . . Bethlehem, Judaeian soil!"¹—not in Bethlehem of Galilee, which was only a few miles from Nazareth. He brought back to the minds of his readers one version of an old tradition about the tomb of "Rachel," the favourite wife of one of their great patriarchs—that it was at that very Bethlehem. He stopped himself in the middle of his story to say that the little local tragedy of the slaughter of the baby *boys* of the neighbours of the parents of Jesus—a tragedy which, in days when massacre was a common feature of public policy, was soon lost sight of and forgotten—was enough to set that ancient mother in Israel "wailing"² again in her tomb, as Jeremiah in his day had suggested she might be doing for her children—her descendants, who were then going into exile—some of whom were destined to die or to be put to death on the road.

In the customary manner also—recalling a whole section of Scripture through partial quotation of it, or by naming an outstanding feature of it³—this evangelist recalled

¹ Matt. ii. 1, 5f., cf. Micah v. 2.

² Matt. ii. 18, cf. Jer. xxxi. 15.

³ Compare how the section "the Bush" is so recalled in Mark xii. 26—Luke xx. 37. This is obscured for the English reader by the insertion of words in italics. In our English versions italics signify not emphasis, but that there are no

further the "out of Egypt"¹ paragraph from the book of the prophet Hosea—a passage which was a prophetic commentary on words in the Law² which Rabbis applied Messianically. The point of that piece of sublime preaching was that "when Israel was young then" was it that Jehovah "began to love him," and that ever after He had taken care of him, and had given him what guidance and protection were necessary to his growth to maturity. In this very association this thought is credited by Luke's authority to Mary herself. It is there represented that the mother of this Jesus used to sing of how Jehovah "took hold of Israel His boy."³ The thought of the providence of God in preserving the life of him who came to be regarded by many as representative of Israel at its best, very early had found a place in the hymns of these people. In his own way, then, the evangelist was saying to his readers, "As it had been in the experience of our people Israel, so, thank God, it was in the experience of this Israelite

words in the original text corresponding to the italicised words. This filling out of the meaning of the original text is often justifiable. A noteworthy instance of the abuse of this liberty is the insertion of "worms" and "body" in the translation of Job xix. 26 in the Authorised Version.

¹ Matt. ii. 15, cf. Hos. xi. 1-4.

² Exod. iv. 22, "Israel is my son, my firstborn."

³ Luke i. 54.

of Israelites, this real Bethlehemite, Jesus." By the same good providence of God *he* was taken care of, when a child—*he* was preserved till manhood.

Then, in completion of the introduction to his Gospel, he made his last point with the skill and learning and very method of verbal association and deduction, which at the time was becoming more and more characteristic of the Rabbis in their interpretation of Scripture.¹ For this purpose he discerned a double reference to his subject in "the Prophets"—the second list of sacred books which were accepted among his people as an authoritative commentary on those of the first sacred list, the Law. He told his readers that, while "Nazarene,"² it was true, meant to most folk "one who came from Nazareth," to him—steeped as he was in this prophetic literature—it had come to have another and very suggestive double reference.

¹ This Rabbinical method of interpretation of Scripture was in vogue at the time. By this means the Rabbis were able to deduce from Scripture their own social and religious programme. They thus imparted their new spirit to the old letter. Thereby they kept everything up to date from their point of view. Some kept closer to the letter than others, finding some significance in very minute details. Others had more regard for the historical sense. The evangelist's method here, then, was well understood among his people and others associated with them in the matters of religion.

² Matt. ii. 23. The Greek here is *nazōraios*.

On the one hand it now signified "the branch,"¹ the only branch of the old Davidic house in Israel which really mattered now—notwithstanding the beginnings of other nationalistic movements. On the other hand it served to draw attention to "the survivor," *par excellence*, "of the survivors² of Israel"—a very common topic in Hebrew circles after the fall of Jerusalem and the survival of official Judaism³ at the academy of Jabneh on the coast of Palestine.

In respect to pure religion the evangelist urged that this Jesus was the real survivor of Israel. He was going to shew his readers that the vital influence of Israel, "the light of the nations," such as he hoped "may" yet "reach to the ends of the earth,"⁴ was now actually being exerted most of all through this very Jesus. Jesus of Bethlehem of Judaea—the man from Nazareth in Galilee, as some would say—was the offspring of a devout

¹ Isa. xi. 1. "Branch" or "shoot" in the Hebrew is *nēṣer*.

² Isa. xlix. 6, reading the Hebrew *natsōrai*, "the preserved" or "the survivors."

³ *Johanan ben Zakkai* escaped from Jerusalem before the final catastrophe befell the city. He established his academy at *Yabneh* on the Mediterranean coast, where there were already many Jewish deserters of all ranks in society. Later he took the bold step of declaring this academy the true Sanhedrin for all Israel. There the heart of Judaism survived the shock of the fall of the Temple.

⁴ Isa. xlix. 6, cf. Matt. xxviii. 19f.

couple in Israel, and through him was being exerted not only on some of his fellow countrymen, but also on others as well, the one really vital surviving influence of his people, Israel.

This evangelist and his fellow evangelist were, then, in essential agreement here as elsewhere. His own accent was very decidedly Jewish; that of Luke was as emphatically Gentilish; but they were clearly one in this, that this real son of a Joseph and a Mary who were themselves of the ancient stock of Bethlehem, and no other, should be recognised both as "the glory . . . of Israel"¹ and "a light for revelation" of the one true and living God "to the nations."² He, who had given to them something in religion finer than the transformed Rabbinic Judaism of Jabneh, was himself a man of Jewish parentage.

¹ When *Johanan ben Zakkai* was dying, his disciples addressed him as "Light of Israel,"—reminding him of the reality of his achievements. See *Berachoth* 28b.

² Luke ii. 32.

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