

## Sidelights on the Virgin-Birth.

NOT long since I addressed by request a number of medical students on the subject of the Virgin Birth, and so many sidelights were thrown on the subject in its study that some may be of interest to the readers of the CHURCHMAN. It is even possible, so pregnant are the words of Scripture, that amongst much which may be familiar, some points may be quite new to its readers.

I do not propose here to advance any *à priori* arguments of a deductive nature on the inherent necessity of such a birth if God is to be manifest in flesh, nor on the results which may be supposed to flow from it. Indeed, argument is far from my purpose; and especially any of a theological or ecclesiastical nature, for neither of which am I sufficiently equipped. I propose merely to review with great brevity from the standpoint of a Christian physician the evidence, principally indirect, concerning the virgin birth.

As a doctor I may perhaps be allowed to remark on the extreme fitness of the beloved physician of the Bible, St. Luke being our chief source of information. The details of the birth are not given us by a woman, nor by an ordinary man, nor by any ecclesiastic, nor even by any Jew or Galilean, but by the only Gentile writer in the New Testament—one, moreover, who, by his calling, was naturally indicated as the most suitable narrator of such a unique story.

Words fail to adequately mark one's sense of the way in which the evangelist has succeeded. The extreme beauty and simplicity, as well as the accuracy, and yet delicate reticence of the whole narrative, together with the deeply spiritual and lofty tone of the entire scene, reveals indeed to us a higher source than even St. Luke. None doubt that God can speak in power through whom He pleases, but we note with extreme interest that He has drawn for us this transcendent picture, this heavenly idyll, by the pen most fitted by education and profession, by absence of all racial prejudice, as well as by a most devout, refined and reverent spirit, to do so.

The birth of our Lord is only given in any detail by Matthew the taxgatherer, and Luke the physician, although, as we shall see, there are many other allusions to it elsewhere. With regard to the four evangelists, the recognized purport of their gospels accounts

for this. St. Mark portrays our Lord as "the Servant," and no one wants to hear about the birth of a servant; while St. John has before him "the Son of God," the eternal Word, Whose birth is not in question. But St. Matthew and St. Luke take up Christ's human side as King, and as man amongst men respectively; and here both birth and genealogy come in, and find their appropriate place.

Between St. Matthew and St. Luke there is, however, a further difference. The former gives us the story from Joseph's point of view, which may be called the exoteric, together with his genealogy. St. Luke gives us Mary's story from her point of view, which we may call the esoteric, and, as we shall see, her genealogy.

With this very brief introduction, then, we will proceed to review in some order the passages that directly or indirectly concern our study; laying especial stress on those indirect proofs which we have called "sidelights," and which by their very unconsciousness often impress the semi-sceptical reader far more than those direct *ex cathedra* statements obviously written that he might believe.

Such indeed is the perversity of our humanity, that we are frequently more inclined to believe when we feel the narrative is not trying to make us do so, than when it is. This indeed rests on a deep metaphysical basis, and may not be all mere perversity. The saying *in vino veritas* illustrates this; as it simply means that when we are partly unconscious we say what we really mean and believe; whereas, in full consciousness, we often rather say what we wish others to believe than what we believe ourselves. Now it is obvious that if a man, in a position to know the circumstances, narrates an incident, and subsequently in speaking of other matters unconsciously confirms what he has said, we are safe in regarding his word as absolutely true.

Such is the nature of the evidence given by "sidelights."

1. To begin at the beginning we must start with the genealogies (just so far as they touch on our subject). All are agreed that St. Matthew gives the genealogy of Joseph, and of Christ as King of the Jews, and his reputed son. This genealogy is fittingly a descent from Abraham. St. Luke, on the contrary, gives an ascent to Adam and to God, inasmuch as his subject is Christ as man and Head of the race. Most now accept this as Mary's genealogy, and the grounds on which it is contested (given by Dean Farrar in the Cambridge Bible and Rev. P. M. Barnard in Hastings' Dictionary)

are not very weighty or convincing ; inasmuch as neither lay any stress on two points of importance. They admit that Christ could not be the Son of David unless Mary was descended from him ; and this makes it still more remarkable why it should be denied that St. Luke's genealogy is hers when such a record appears a necessity ! The Hebrews did not allow genealogical tables of women as such. If a family ended with a daughter only ; instead of naming her, they inserted the name of her husband as *son* instead of *son-in-law* of the daughter's father. Two sons-in-law may be noticed in confirmation of this. (a) Salathiel was the son of Jechonias (1 Chron. iii. 17, and Matt. i. 12), but son-in-law of Neri. It was the same Salathiel, because in both genealogies he begets Zorobabel, which is only to be understood by Salathiel marrying Neri's daughter and Neri being without male issue. This would unite both lines in Zorobabel ; that of Joseph in St. Matthew continuing through one of his sons, Abiud ; and Mary's (St. Luke) through Rhesa, who was another. (b) In the same way Joseph, whose father was undoubtedly Jacob (Matt. i. 16), is implied to be the son (for son-in-law) of Heli in St. Luke ; though not actually so called *by begetting* as in St. Matthew. This is quite in accordance with Jewish procedure. A further reason for regarding St. Luke's genealogy as that of Mary is because her descent from David (see above) is necessitated if Christ was to be of the royal line and be born of a virgin. Christ's right to David's throne, apart from this, is assumed elsewhere (Acts ii. 30, xiii. 23 ; Romans i. 3).

2. St. Matthew i. 16, " Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." I submit this unique sentence is impossible if Joseph were the actual father of the Lord. It is also the first New Testament fulfilment of another most remarkable statement in Genesis iii. 15. We there read, " I will put enmity between thee (the serpent) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed ; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Taking the serpent as the old serpent, and " thy seed " as Christ (cf. Gal. iii. 16), and the bruising of the head as fulfilled in Hebrews ii. 14, it is clear that the seed of *the woman* (a unique concept and found only here) can refer only to the Virgin-birth. We read of the seed of Abraham, not of Sarah, and so throughout ; and we submit that but for the Virgin-birth (here implicitly foretold), the announcement would be made to Adam, and the usual expression " his seed "

used. This argument is even of more force to Eastern than to Western minds.

3. If St. Matthew i. 21 be compared with Luke i. 13, the Virgin-birth is again seen to be indirectly implied by the omission in the dream of Joseph of the word "thee," which occurs in the announcement of the miraculous birth of the Baptist. In verse 21 we read, "Mary shall bring forth"—but not "to thee"; in Luke i. 13 we read "Elizabeth shall bear *thee* a son." *Verbum sap.*

4. Again, St. Matthew i. 21 is addressed to Joseph after the conception of the virgin; St. Luke i. 13 to the father, Zacharias, before the conception of his wife. Why?

5. St. Matthew i. 23, "The virgin" (Hebrew, "*Alma*"; Greek, "*parthenos*"). We are told this prophecy was never used by the Jews to predict the Virgin-birth of the Messiah—the concept being foreign to the Jewish mind. The idea could not, therefore, have been born on Jewish soil, and Harnack shows it could not originate among the Gentiles. It must be remembered that all the bestial stories of Greek, Egyptian, Buddhist and Hindu gods have nothing in common with virgin birth, which is supernatural; but with varieties of sexual irregularities, which are natural. "*Alma*" is not necessarily "a virgin," though Luther characteristically offered 100 florins "if any one could show the word ever meant a married woman," but he adds that God only knows where he is to find them!

6. St. Matthew ii. 2. Here we come on a sidelight truly remarkable, which seems to be never considered by those who deny Mary's genealogy in St. Luke. "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" This, as we have seen, makes the Virgin-birth impossible unless Mary was of the house of David (as Joseph was proved to be). It is difficult to believe that St. Luke did not see this:—that all his story of the Virgin-birth was useless without the genealogy of Mary. But there is more than this. Gabriel regards the throne of David (St. Luke i. 32) as the inheritance of the virgin's Son through Mary. But no woman could have inherited in Israel, still less pass on a heritage, but for an extraordinary event in Numbers,—I refer to the case of the daughters of Zelophehad. Inasmuch as out of the thousands of cases that must have been brought before Moses in the course of forty years, this is the only one preserved in the imperishable records of the Pentateuch, I suggest it must be recorded for some supreme purpose; and may venture so far as to say that but for this legal

decision Christ would not technically and literally be born King of the Jews. In Numbers xxvii. we get abruptly introduced the case of five women who by the law could not inherit. Moses felt the case (for some unknown reason) so supremely important, that he dared not decide what (on the face of it) was a simple matter ; but brought it before the Lord : and it was God who decided that hereafter women could inherit. This decision enabled Mary to receive her royal heritage, and pass it on to her Son. But there was even more. In Numbers xxxvi. these irrepressible daughters come with a second difficulty. What about the marriage of heiresses? And again Moses gives the word of the Lord to the effect, that unless they married in their own tribe their inheritance was forfeit. Thus Mary, to preserve her heritage, must marry in her own tribe of Judah, which she did. Who in reading the Pentateuch could have foreseen that these decisions are bound up with the Virgin-birth and the royal heritage of Christ? We may pause here one moment that we may not miss the wonders we are discussing. In the distant but unmistakable references to the Virgin-birth to which we have referred in Genesis and Numbers, made in the one case in speaking to the serpent and in another in a legal decision, we cannot fail to see that one Mind, knowing the end from the beginning, is the real source of Holy Scripture. This again is a strong argument in favour of the truth of the opening chapters of St. Matthew and St. Luke, and the record they contain.

7. In St. Mark vi. 3 we read of Christ as " the Son of Mary."

8. We now read in St. Luke i. 14, " Thou shalt have joy and gladness," which has great meaning in the East. No such promise is made to Joseph at the birth of a far greater Son. Why ?

9. St. Luke i. 28. We note here the angel makes the announcement of the two miraculous births, in one case to the father, in the other to the mother, of the child. The only reason is the Virgin-birth.

10. St. Luke i. 31, " Thou shalt conceive" (lit., " thou art now conceiving"), i.e., not at some remote future time (after marriage), but now (cf. St. Matt. i. 20).

11. St. Luke i. 35, " The holy thing which is to be born " (R.V. margin). Here the margin is right, the point being, not that the child was to become holy after it was born, but that it was holy *before birth* in a special and unique sense, on account of the Virgin-birth.

12. St. Luke i. 36, "She *also* hath conceived." This clearly confirms 10.

13. St. Luke i. 38, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Compare carefully with this Psalm lxxxvi. 16 and Psalm cxvi. 16. Here the word handmaid is "*doulee*," in the Psalm it is "*paidiskee*," both meaning "a female slave." The unique expression in the Psalms of the Spirit of Christ as the "son of thy handmaid" is surely an indirect corroboration of the Virgin-birth.

14. St. Luke i. 46 and 68. Here we read the two immortal songs—the Magnificat and the Benedictus, undoubtedly among the strongest, undesigned, indirect proofs of the Virgin-birth—proofs that to an Eastern would be conclusive. It is ever the father who rejoices over the birth of a son (not a daughter); the woman is never prominent. Here in these two miraculous births we get, not, as must have been the case had Christ been Joseph's son—the songs of Zacharias and Joseph, but *mirabile dictu* the songs of Zacharias and Mary—the father of the one, and the mother of the other; and Joseph is silent and unnoticed. Why? There is but one possible answer. We may say here, with the chief priests and elders on another occasion (St. Luke xxii. 71), "What need we any further witness?"

I may observe in passing, that the most strenuous efforts have been made by Harnack, Schmiedel and others to strike out verses 34-5, on critical grounds, but without success.

15. St. Luke i. 63. John and Jesus are each named by God, and Zacharias so names his child, but Joseph does not (i. 31).

16. St. Luke i. 39, "Mary . . . went into the hill country with haste" (some seventy or eighty miles). Canon Farrar points out this is an undesigned and indirect proof of the Virgin-birth; for no betrothed virgin could travel alone. The only thing that could make the virgin break the custom was the fact that her condition had been reported to Joseph (St. Matt. i. 18-25), hence her haste to go to her kinswomen, her only resource under the circumstances.

17. St. Luke i. 43, "Mother of my Lord"—never "mother of God," or "my lady."

18. St. Luke ii. 5. But for the daughters of Zelophehad Mary would not have needed to travel over the hills to Bethlehem in such a condition, for she would not have inherited the rights of David, nor transmitted them to her Son.

19. St. Luke ii. 48, 49, "Thy Father," "my Father." Here Christ directly refuses to recognize Joseph as father.

20. St. Luke iii. 23, "As was supposed."

21. St. Luke iii. 38, "Adam, which was the son of God." Thus genealogy (of Mary) begins with the second Adam as the son of God, and traces his line directly back to the first Adam, also God's son. There are only these two so descended: the first man and the second, and the first and last Adam. This gives a wonderful and dramatic completeness to the whole story, and a further proof the genealogy is Mary's.

22. St. John i. 13. Until the end of the fourth century the reading here was, "Who was born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God"—words which are directly applicable to the mystery of the Virgin-birth (familiar to St. John), and but little applicable to the sons of God whose history ends with verse 12. The word "and," moreover, in verse 14, clearly continues the subject; which would be impossible if verse 13 referred to believers. This reading is strongly supported, amongst others, by Zahn, Justin Martyn, Iræneus (178), Tertullian (208), Hippolytus, Augustine, the Codex Veronensis (very ancient), etc. One may also point out as very significant that when the birth of the sons of God is spoken of by the same writer (1 John v. 18), the perfect tense is used; here when he speaks of Christ—the aorist, this birth being unique.

23. St. John i. 14, "And the word was made flesh and 'tabernacled' among us." Canon Girdlestone and others regard the word here as corroborating the view now widely held that our Lord was born between September 25 and 29 (the Feast of Tabernacles), in which case the annunciation by Gabriel would be on Christmas Day. A curious confirmation of this is found in the Feast of St. Michael and All Angels on September 29; the origin of which has been long lost, but is now believed to be in commemoration of St. Luke ii. 13, 14, at the birth of our Lord in Bethlehem. I do not go into any proofs of this, such as the impossibility of a journey of eighty miles along the hilltops in mid-winter, and the fact of the taxing taking place after harvest, but pass on to consider the significance of the season. At this time, in that year, the sun was in the sign Virgo in the Zodiac (attributed by many to Seth, and certainly prehistoric and of divine import (Psalm xix. 1-6). This virgin has high in her right

hand the Branch (tsemeh). There are in Hebrew twenty words for "branch," but this particular word is used of this branch in the Zodiac, and also exclusively of Christ (Jer. xxiii. 5-xxxiii. 15; Zech. iii. 8-vi. 12). In her left hand dropping into the ground is the wheat with its bright corn or grain—"spica," a star of the first magnitude (St. John xii. 24.)<sup>1</sup> Thus in the right hand we see Christ coming into the world as the Branch, and in the left His falling into the ground and dying. This virgin in the heavens shining over the Virgin on earth in the inn at Bethlehem is another remarkable coincidence and proof of the Virgin-birth that is but little noticed. Not only so, but this sign is surrounded by three constellations, one of which is a virgin with a child in her lap, to which Shakespeare alludes in *Titus Andronicus*, Act iv., Scene 3, as the "good boy in the virgin's lap." "Made flesh" refers to the conception on Christmas Day. "Tabernacled among us" refers to the birth at the close of the Feast of Tabernacles in September: both stupendous events being announced by the highest angelic messengers.

24. Romans i. 3, 4, "Born of the seed of David according to the flesh . . . declared to be the Son of God." Here we get the Virgin-birth through the virgin made possible (as we have seen) by the legal decision in Numbers: and also the divine Fatherhood—the only possible origin of the God-man, Christ Jesus. (See 27.)

25. Galatians iv. 4, "Born of a woman." The pointed way in which this is stated implies, I think, the Virgin-birth.

26. 1 Timothy ii. 15, "She shall be saved through *the* child-bearing"—a clear reference to the Virgin-birth.

27. Hebrews i. 5 and v. 5 (see also Acts xiii. 33; Roman i. 4; Psalm ii. 7). These Scriptures are again conclusive as to the Virgin-birth, Christ being begotten when He was "made flesh" as Son, but declared to be so with power in resurrection (Rom. i. 4).

Perhaps, in conclusion, I may point out that Professor Sanday says that St. Matthew and St. Luke i. and ii. are the most archaic writings in the New Testament, the type of thought and feeling being the oldest. Sir William Ramsay regards the authenticity as beyond question. Indeed, since the discovery of Tatian's Diatessaron<sup>2</sup> the

<sup>1</sup> "His star" (Matt. ii. 2) possibly refers to this. The Magi were great astronomers.

<sup>2</sup> The Harmony was discovered in the Vatican Library in 1885 and commences with the first words of St. John's Gospel, showing he was regarded as one of four evangelists about fifty years after his death.



criticism of the genuineness of the Gospels has largely died down ; though formerly from the days of Marcion the most determined efforts were made to do away with the Virgin-birth. The point that the correct reading (St. Luke ii. 33) is "his father" is of no weight as proving the parentage of Joseph ; as indeed is evident by St. Luke's use of it. In the pseudo-gospel of Matthew we find in one chapter "Jesus, the son of Joseph," and in another "I have no carnal parenthood."

I have now reached the end of my Bible testimony, though I do not for a moment suppose that I have given all the Scripture evidence. It is well to note that those who reject this testimony, generally deny also the resurrection and the miraculous element in the New Testament. I cannot conclude without a wish that this essential doctrine, the glory of the Church and believed in the early centuries by all save the Ebonites and some Gnostics, may again take its due place in all the teachings of the Church ; and I would venture to hope that some of the facts I have given will help to convince the careful reader that the only way to account for them is to believe that the Virgin-birth *actually did happen*, and that the Scriptures are true.

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